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A

COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

BY THE

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PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BUTLER, PA.

WITH

INTRODUCTORY NOTICES,

BY THE

REV. A. T. McGILL, D.D.,

PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.,

AND THE

REV. M. W. JACOBUS, D.D.,

PROFESSOR IN THE WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, PA.

"The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it."
ECCLESIASTES vii. 12.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTICES.

From the Rev. Alexander T. McGill, D.D., *Professor of Ecclesiastic, Homiletic, and Pastoral Theology, in the Seminary at Princeton, N. J.*

I have been favoured with an opportunity of looking over the manuscript of Dr. Young's Commentary on Ecclesiastes. An early and long acquaintance with him, and the sterling qualities of his mind, would have prompted me to say, that nothing which he may venture to publish can be without value and interest to the church. But a perusal of this work gives me a higher estimate of his qualifications, than any previous partiality had presumed.

It is eminently judicious; and enlivened with originality of thought, vivacity of expression, and practical pungency, which must make it popular and useful; while it will be acknowledged as able and solid—a valuable contribution to sacred criticism.

A peculiar charm of the work is that unity, with which he gathers the many difficult passages of this book to one purpose—a point of convergence, where everything is luminous and intensely interesting. And whether the judgment of the reader is convinced or not, that he has found in this central theme a key for the solution of every difficulty, it is enriched by the interpretation; and satisfied also, that this remarkable book is a sheaf, to be tied up somewhere, and carried by one great principle worthy of Divine inspiration.

I could wish, that the modesty of the Author had not imposed on his ability and originality a *form* for this Commentary, so artificial—merely because it has been found successful by others upon other books of the Bible. The mould ought to have been made original as the exegesis. The most enigmatic portions of the Old Testament, and the most dogmatic portions of the New, can hardly be cast into the same forms of analysis, without an excess of ingenuity.

But this is only a matter of taste. And if the work be made in this

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form more instructive to the majority of readers, it is the best form, after all, and another claim which the Author has earned, to the favour and gratitude of all that love the oracles of God.

ALEXANDER T. McGILL.

May 16*th*, 1864.

From the Rev. Melancthon W. Jacobus, D.D., *Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature and Exegesis, in the Western Theological Seminary.*

There is a Jewish tradition that the Book of Ecclesiastes was one of those Scriptures which was not to be read by any one under the age of thirty years. This tradition itself is only an expression of the difficulty which the book has given to ancient interpreters. The questions of its plan, authorship, date, and general object, are questions which are not settled by the increase of expositions—nor is it necessary that they should be.

Herder has said, "That it is best to make as free a use of the book as possible, and let its individual parts serve us for that purpose," without binding it to a definite plan. He has also said, "I do not know any book in the Old Testament, which describes more fully, more convincingly or more concisely the whole sum of human life, with all its changes and vanities, its occupations and plans, its speculations and pleasures, and at the same time that which alone is real, lasting, progressive, and rewarding."

This is quite the view taken of the book by Dr. Young in this practical Commentary. One can see with "half an eye," that all the ejaculations of "*Vanity of Vanities*" with which the book abounds, belong to a certain phase of life, as held in contrast with another and better. It is, therefore, a most superficial estimate of the doctrine, that understands it as teaching a refined Epicureanism. This is that mode of living which the author testifies against—and this, it would seem, out of his own deep and bitter experience.

If the book is to be read as a formal sermon from the text which Dr.

Young finds to be the key of the whole, then we are to understand the Preacher, as highly experimental, adducing his own earlier life as a practical trial of what is *wisdom* and what is *vanity;* and so addressing himself to his hearers in a most practical discourse. The book has been compared by some to the *Pensées* of Pascal and the *Confessions* of Augustine.

The author seems to record his own life-struggles—to think aloud for the benefit of his hearers. He appears as one reasoning with himself, and brings forward to view the processes by which he arrived at wise conclusions. It would be, therefore, a sad mistake to understand the workings of his worldly heart, here interspersed, as though these were the teachings of the book or the doctrines of Inspiration. The instruction is to be found in a careful study of the whole Book, and an analysis of its conclusion. As the Book of Job, the debate must be heard throughout, and the truth gathered from the results that are reached. This is expressed at the close of the Book: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments," &c.

This Book of Ecclesiastes has plainly an affinity with the Book of Proverbs and with the Song of Solomon; and points to the Practical Wisdom and to the Personal Wisdom, who is also the Personal Word. This fact would go the whole length of fixing the authorship upon Solomon; though from Grotius to Hengstenberg great names have held otherwise. *Luther* understands the teaching of the book to be, "that with gratitude we should use the gifts and allotments of God, which are bestowed upon us with his benediction only, that we have a tranquil and quiet heart, and a mind filled with joy, content with the word and ways of God."

The stages of reflection and experience here expressed are those through which many a mind has passed, in reaching the gospel conclusions. This is only a forewhispering of that Gospel in which Life and Immortality are brought to Light—*Life that is Life*—Life as dignified and illuminated by the revelation of immortality. "In Him was Life, and the Life was the Light of Men." And there is no true Light, however boasted, apart from this Divine and Eternal Life revealed and offered in Jesus Christ. This is WISDOM. Many a one has so found it: and the piercing outcry, "ALL IS VANITY," has led to the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

This portion of Scripture, as was intended, has a wonderful adaptedness to all times and people; and its valuable lessons, as expounded by the author of this Commentary, will be found eminently fitting for the day in which we live. No age has required a more earnest and authoritative inculcation of a high morality in distinction from worldliness and self-seeking. No people has more needed those lessons of heavenly wisdom, which point to the future life as the proper aim of men. Dr. Young has treated the words of the great preacher in this practical and popular light. And we pray that through his expositions here, these inspired words of the wise man may be found as goads, and "as nails fastened by the Masters of Assemblies, which are given from *One Shepherd.*"

M. W. JACOBUS.

September 25th, 1863.

PREFACE.

SOLOMON is one of history's brightest luminaries. Among the stars of the first magnitude, he stands out in dazzling brilliancy. In his age, science was but in its infancy, it is true. In Egypt and in the East were wise men; and in Tyre, ship-building and other arts had arrived at some perfection. Several names of wise and learned men are mentioned in sacred history as co-eval with Solomon. But he was wiser than all of them,—wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda. "And his fame was in all nations round about." He was sagacious in all his intercourse with men. His plans for enriching his kingdom were maturely formed and energetically executed. He managed to bring almost the whole commerce of the world into his territories. By navies and caravans the wealth of the nations was brought to his door. With many of the modern sciences he was unacquainted. But had he lived in our day, with his curious and investigating mind, he might have been the rival if not the superior of our ablest philosophers. He was a poet, a proverb-maker, a botanist, and a horticulturist. It would almost seem that he anticipated some of our modern discoveries in anatomical science, or was inspired to do so. (See remarks on Chapter xii. verses 3, 6.) As a ruler he had great tact and a sound judgment; having sought wisdom from God. "Give me," said he, "a wise and understanding heart." Till laid aside by his social relations, Solomon was also great in goodness. He was inspired to write three of the sacred books. His prayer at the dedication of the temple was sublime in humble simplicity. And he was a "Preacher." One of his sermons has come down to our time, being inspired. As moved by the Holy Spirit, he delivered the messages of life.

The term "preacher" (original Coheleth) signifies one that collects

the people, i. e., for addressing them. It appears then that this Book of Ecclesiastes is one of Solomon's sermons *preached*. That it was also *written out* appears from chapter xii. verse 10. "The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth." This sermon is also a treatise on *moral philosophy* of a practical kind; and the oldest philosophical treatise extant. Those who teach moral philosophy should not pass by unnoticed this remarkable production. It is Hebrew philosophy. In its inspired eminence, let it take its place among and above all the ancient philosophies of Greece. Let it eclipse, as it does, the teachings of Plato and Socrates and Aristotle. It is not the philosophy of "the porch," but of the sanctuary. It is not the philosophy of Epicurus, though some have branded it as teaching the sentiments of that philosopher. It is not the earnest student, but the superficial reader, that will discover anything Epicurean in the treatise. What then are the teachings of this Book?

SCOPE.

The following views are suggested to the intelligent reader as the design and teachings of Ecclesiastes:

This Book of Ecclesiastes is a discourse or sermon of Solomon. It is about the length of an ordinary modern sermon. Though a sermon, it is not quite as methodical as some modern sermons, but far more so than many others. Like modern sermons, it commences with a text or theme for discussion. When or where uttered, we are not informed. There are reasons for supposing that it was delivered in the presence of the foreign wise men and princes, who, like the queen of Sheba, came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear his wisdom. "There came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." (1 Kings iv. 34). Standing up in the presence of his curious and learned auditors, as Paul did in Athens at a later day, he spoke of God, of his counsels, and of a future judgment. And, indeed, on a careful inspection, this sermon and Paul's address to the Athenians have strong points of resemblance. Both are to us now revealed theology; but they are discourses on natural theology. Paul pointed to the altar erected "to the unknown God." Hence, he directs his hearers to God, who made the world and giveth life; to God's purposes; and finally to the judgment. So Solomon pointed to nature; to the rising and setting sun, the shifting breeze, the running rivers (i.

5–7). Then he directs the hearers to God's purposes (iii. 14), and to the judgment. "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (iii. 17). "For all these things God shall bring thee into judgment" (xi. 9). To argue a future and a judgment seems to be the object of Solomon's sermon. But as his audience were not all familiar with the previously-written Hebrew Scriptures, he would not argue from those Scriptures. He would prove another state of existence in a new and original way. He would present his own original investigations on the subject, as he was inspired to do. And he sets out with the inquiry, *Of what advantage is this life without another?* For this seems to be the true import of the third verse of the first chapter, which is really Solomon's starting point, as will be shown. That verse, which is Solomon's text, reads thus: "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" Labour taken "*under the sun*," is labour for *this* life without regard to a future. And Solomon uses the phrase "under the sun" no less than twenty-eight times in this short treatise, or sermon, by which it is evident that his mind attached an important meaning to it. He contrasts labour taken for this life, and the rewards of this life, with labour taken for the future world and its glorious rewards. Keeping in view that the Book of Ecclesiastes is a treatise on the question, *what profit is there in this life if there is no other?* and that this question is preparatory to the great doctrine of *a future life and a future judgment*, which Solomon eventually declares, we find the difficulties of the Book cleared up. We find a freshness and beauty about it that is truly enchanting. The enigmas and riddles of the Book are all solved; and the treatise stands out prominent—an argument for a God, for immortality, for a future reward. If the great object of the sermon is kept in view, all the parts harmonize, and constitute a beautiful and connected whole, and vindicate the government of God from the assaults so often made upon it. What seem to be skeptical teachings present themselves as forcible arguments for a future state. What profit is there in this life if there is no other? If there is no other, "that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

If there is no other life, "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." If there is no other life,

"Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?" Why be a martyr for principle, and receive no reward?

If there is no other life, generation succeeds generation, and passes away like the rising and setting sun, the shifting breeze, the running rivers. Like these, human life is but a coming and going, a labour without satisfaction, accomplishing nothing worthy of the great Author of life. There is no profit—no new thing to satisfy the soul. From all this a future is inferred. But till the third chapter a future is not distinctly *announced*. In the third and subsequent chapters the judgment is distinctly declared.

But, it may be asked, why consider the third verse and not the second of the first chapter, the text or theme? In reply the following views are presented:

The first and second verses of the first chapter, and the twelfth chapter from the eighth verse to the conclusion, seem to have been inserted by a different person from the writer of the treatise. He was equally inspired, it is true; but there are strong evidences that another person (call him, if you please, the editor of Solomon's work) wrote the first and second verses as an *introduction*, and the last seven verses of the last chapter as a suitable *conclusion* of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is not uncommon for the sacred books to be supplemented by some one besides the writers of them. Of the books written by Moses, Numbers and Deuteronomy seem to have been thus supplemented. In Numbers xii. 3, we read: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth." This verse was evidently not written by Moses; for he would not thus speak of himself. It is put in parenthetically, perhaps by the prophet Samuel. The last chapter of Deuteronomy was added by some other person; for Moses did not write an account of his own death. Joshua probably wrote the Book called by his name. But, if so, he could not have written the last five verses, for they give an account of his death. They were, therefore, inserted by some other inspired person. Some other passages in Joshua seem also to have been inserted by another. (See iv. 9, and xv. 63.)

The first Book of Samuel to the end of the twenty-fourth chapter, seems to have been written by the prophet Samuel himself. But the remaining seven chapters, and the second Book, could not have been written by him; for they record events which took place after his death.

Indeed, the two Books of Samuel seem to have been written by the three prophets, Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. (See 1 Chron. xxix. 29.)

The Book of Nehemiah was written by Nehemiah; as is evident from his using the first person singular in relating things connected with himself. But in that book is a passage containing twenty-six verses, which seems to have been inserted by another. Horne says: "The insertion of the greater part of the register in xii. 1–26, may be accounted for by supposing it either to have been added by some subsequent author, or perhaps by the authority of the great synagogue: for it seems to be unconnected with the narrative of Nehemiah, and if genuine, must ascribe to him a degree of longevity which appears scarcely credible."*

The Psalms were written by ten different authors; and yet they are called "the Psalms of David," because David was the principal author. The Book of Proverbs is ascribed to Solomon; and the book starts out with the announcement, "The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel." And yet the thirtieth chapter is by Agur, the son of Jakeh; and the thirty-first is by King Lemuel. Also the first six verses of the first chapter seem to be by another. The first verse of the Song of Solomon seems also by another, simply stating who the author was.

So the Book of Ecclesiastes is a sermon of Solomon, with a preface and an appendix by another. The following may be assigned as reasons for the opinion:

(1.) Like Nehemiah, Solomon uses the first person singular when speaking of himself in this book. But the verses supposed to be added, speak of him in the third person, calling him "the Preacher."

(2.) The Preacher is complimented as wise, and as teaching the people knowledge, which Solomon would hardly have said of himself in this form.

(3.) It would be perfectly natural for a person, in putting a preface and an appendix to another's sermon, to commence the appendix with the same words with which he left the preface, to show to the reader where his own remarks had been left off and then resumed again. He prefaces with the sentence, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities; all is vanity." And, then, after laying the sermon before the reader, he repeats, as calling the reader's attention to

* Hengstenberg, following Kleinert, thinks that chapters viii. ix. and x. were written by Ezra, and adopted into his work by Nehemiah.

what he had said, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity."

(4.) As another reason for supposing that there is a preface and an appendix by another; there is completeness in the sermon, if we leave out the verses in question; and the conclusion of the sermon is most sublime: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Thus the first verse is like the title-page of a pamphlet, announcing the author. The second verse is a general statement, calling the attention to the contents of the pamphlet. But it does not precisely point out the whole of the great theme discussed. The editor allows Solomon to do this in his own words; which he does in the third verse.

It seemed necessary to make the above somewhat protracted remarks, to show that the third verse, and not the second, is the theme of Solomon, and, therefore, the key to the whole treatise. This having been overlooked by commentators, they have necessarily failed to bring out, in its force and beauty, the connection of the parts of the treatise, and the pertinence of many passages. It is strange that some should argue, as they do, that the key (or text) is found in the middle of the discourse. And yet it has been maintained, that verse fifteenth of the seventh chapter is the key. But it is perfectly natural to suppose that an inquiry, placed at the very beginning of Solomon's sermon, should be regarded as containing the essence of the whole, as the text—the key to unlock the hidden treasures of the whole book. It is all-important, therefore, that we arrive at a correct decision, as to the meaning of Solomon's theme, the third verse of chapter first.

We speak of mere worldly things, and call them *sublunary; i. e.*, under the moon. Solomon, on the other hand, calls them *tahath-hashamesh; i. e.*, under the sun. It is evident that Solomon meant to restrict his question to the things of *this* world in contradistinction to the things of *another* or *future* life. We must consider him, then, as contrasting the labours for this life with labours for another life. The former he pronounces, by the strong negative implied in the question, *profitless*. This life is incomplete without another. There must, therefore, be another. He then proceeds immediately to illustrate his theme.

Verse 4. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." The original is forcible. "Generation passeth, and generation cometh." If there is no future,

the coming and going of men, generation after generation, is of little consequence. It is just a stage—a mere drama. It is a farce. There is nothing real. There is no result worthy of the great Author of all things. *Man*, so far from being important, is less important than the *earth* on which he lives so short a time. *He* comes and goes, "but the earth abideth." If man's labour terminates on earthly things, and he perishes when he dies, then the true order is reversed; man is not immortal, while the earth *is* immortal (*i. e.*, so far as reason teaches). The earth is the abiding stage, while human life is a coming on and going off—a mere passing scene, soon to terminate without any important result. "*What profit?*"

In the next verses, we have a comparison between several natural phenomena in their apparent barrenness of results, and human beings merely coming and going. The Hebrew ו *vav*, here translated "also," is often used to make a comparison. We may ask, what good is accomplished by generation after generation coming on the stage of life and passing off again, and being no more; just as we may ask, what good is apparently accomplished by the sun rising and setting in a constant round; and the wind whirling about continually; and the rivers running apparently with the view of filling the sea, but never accomplishing it, and returning again. Nothing seems to be accomplished. The sun of this morning is where it was a century ago—it has made no progress. The wind of this day is as it was last year—what has it brought to pass? The Nile of this year overflowing its banks, is but a repetition of every year's process—it seems to have done nothing. There is a monotonous repetition of the same thing. So is man, as though he were reproduced from generation to generation, to run the same round of pain and folly, and life and death, and joy and grief. "*What profit hath life without another life?*"

But Solomon is preparing the way, even in this comparison, to show that there is to be a grand and glorious result, in the far-off future. And he brings it out, especially in the eleventh chapter, by similar figures. The Nile is not a mere waste of waters; but the bread is cast upon it which shall be found after many days (xi. 1). The changing wind brings up the clouds, to scatter their fatness on the furrowed fields (xi. 3). And the sun is not a mere circling orb, to accomplish nothing; but it brings light and joy (xi. 7). And so, the generations of men are not a mere coming and going, with no result. But the soul

lives for ever. "The dust," it is true, "returns to the dust as it was;" but "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (xii. 7).

A careful examination of the whole book will show that this idea is kept in view, viz.: that this life, with all its labours, is absolutely without value, if there is no future.

The last part of the first chapter is devoted to Solomon's qualifications for investigating the subject. He was a king over an enlightened people (v. 12). He applied himself heartily and earnestly to the search (13). He had been an observer (14). And he had discovered that the evils of this world and its deficiencies could not be corrected and supplied by human means (15). He had evidence from communion with his own heart, that he had given himself wholly to the investigation; and the investigation itself had yielded only grief and sorrow (16–18).

The second chapter is principally employed in giving Solomon's experience of the worthlessness of this world in itself considered. He had tested it in all its forms of supposed excellence, and found nothing in it. He, therefore, returns to the question, "What hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured *under the sun?*" for *this* world? He says emphatically that he had found that "there was no profit under the sun" (v. 11).

In the third chapter, after showing that in this life ("under the heaven," v. 1), events are all appointed by Providence; and after resuming the inquiry "what profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" (v. 9), he begins to bring out the great doctrine of a future judgment. Thus he advances, step by step, to announce a future state, which previously he had been inferring from the worthlessness of this life in itself considered; and he declares, also, the certainty of a judgment. The eleventh verse has great depth and force, and prepares the way for a full avowal of Solomon's belief in a future judgment. It is itself a declaration of a future eternal state, and the bearing of the present upon the future. Dr. James Hamilton gives the following liberal, but just translation:—"He hath made everything beautiful in his time, and in the heart of everything he hath set an eternity: so that no man can find out from the beginning to the end any work that God maketh—any process that God conducteth." The word "world" in our translation, is by many able critics translated, "remote time, eternity." God has made everything beautiful in *his* time. The whole, from beginning to end, is his time—eternity is his time. And

he hath set an eternity in the heart of everything. He hath given, as it were, even to inanimate things a purpose to fulfil a future destiny. And till that destiny is fulfilled, no man can find out what God designs to accomplish by it. No one can see from the beginning to the end, or the whole plan.

But the sixteenth and seventeenth verses bring out the great doctrine, which Solomon had been inferring and hinting at, in all its force and clearness. He saw "under the sun," in this world, "the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there." He saw earthly judges partial and unrighteous—wronging the innocent, and clearing the guilty. And God seems to be like them, if we look no further than *this world.* But this leads Solomon to the great utterance of his heart in the seventeenth verse: "I said *in mine heart, God* shall judge the righteous and the wicked."

The great idea is here *fully* brought out, for which he had been preparing the minds of his hearers, viz.: Since there is incompleteness, and crookedness, and sorrow, and apparent injustice under the sun; and man labours in vain if his prospects terminate with this life; there *must* be a future judgment of the righteous and the wicked; there IS a future judgment. This future judgment will have its place as well as things *under the sun*—as well as corrupt earthly courts—as well as our birth, death, etc. As there is a time *here,* "under the heaven," v. 1, so there is a time *there,* at the judgment.

Bishop Patrick says, "the last words of this verse may, in my judgment, be thus most literally translated out of the Hebrew: 'There is time for (judging) every purpose, and every work there.'" But the Bishop supposes the word "*there*" to refer to the corrupt court; whereas, it seems to refer to the final judgment. There is a time for (judging) every purpose and every work *there,* at the final judgment. This seems to be the most consistent application of the word.

To condense the teachings of the whole chapter, Solomon begins with the occurrences known to all; and shows how they are in the hand of God. His sovereignty is seen in our birth and death; in killing and healing; breaking down and building up; sorrow and joy; meeting and parting; getting and losing, etc. He then goes on to show the hand of God guiding "ponderous orbs and mighty incidents" to a far-off goal—to eternity. He brings us to the termination of all earthly events in a righteous award, God justifying himself before the universe. He then

returns to the point to be illustrated, viz.: if there is no future, all is valueless—man and beast share the same fate—life is a farce, unworthy of its Author; man, with his noble powers and lofty aspirations, will at the close of this brief life be no better than a brute! And, yet, this is the infidel's proud desire—his boasted wisdom leads no further.

The fourth chapter is an example of unity in variety; containing several distinct subjects, all brought forward to illustrate the great theme, that there is no profit in life without a future state. Oppression, envy, idleness, anxious labour, the life of a miser, of a ruler, and of a subject; all terminate in vanity and sorrow.

The fifth chapter teaches the failure of *formal* religion, of power and of riches, to secure such advantage as the heart desires.

In the sixth chapter there is a continuation of similar themes, and the author sums up, by showing (vs. 10–12) that all those things that might be supposed to yield advantage in this life have already been named—that it is characteristic of man to seek good from them, but that in so doing he contends with God, and is no better off.

Passing over the intervening chapters, in which are many striking illustrations of the main theme, and some repetitions, the reader's attention is called to the teachings of the last two chapters.

The eleventh is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It is the focus of the blended rays of the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. It is a clear presentation of a future judgment and reward, in beautiful figures of illustration. In the plainest language, and with most solemn emphasis, it is finally declared, that for all things God will bring us to judgment. To be more particular, the chapter teaches as follows, vs. 1–6:—Do present duty, on all occasions, and all your lives, disregarding threatening obstacles, trusting to God to reward you. This is illustrated by casting bread upon the waters—giving portions to many—the clouds and falling timber, sowing and reaping grain, the unborn infant, vs. 7–10. Use God's gifts with reference to rendering an account; and provide against future misery. The whole chapter may be summed up in this brief sentence: *Do* and *enjoy* with reference to a *future award!*

In the twelfth chapter, first seven verses, we have the close of the sermon. In one of the most beautiful allegories ever penned, comparing old age to a decaying and unprotected house, we are prepared for the sublime and literal conclusion: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

The remaining verses, by another writer, show his estimate of Solomon and his work; and also show his sentiments concerning what the book teaches. He sums up all, as the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty (profit) of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Nowhere, not even in the New Testament, is the judgment more clearly presented. But the circumstances attending the general judgment are reserved for the sublime unfoldings of the New Testament.

AUTHORSHIP.

It seems very evident that Solomon was the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is true that some great names support the idea that the book was written by another and a later writer. Among these are Grotius, Eichhorn, Schmidt, De Wette, Rosenmüller, Gesenius, Jahn, &c. With these agree Professor Stuart and Dr. Hengstenberg. Prof. Stuart argues the case at great length in the Introduction to his Commentary. His main arguments are these:

"1. Many things are said by Coheleth (the Preacher) which show that Solomon is only occasionally, and not constantly, speaking.

"2. The general state and condition of things, when this book was written, indicates a period very different from that of Solomon's reign."

"3. Another source of doubt as to the authorship of Solomon, springs from the style and diction of the book." As Prof. Stuart had the arguments of all his predecessors before him, it is likely that he has presented all that can be said upon the subject in its full force. And it is fortunate for the cause of truth, that by his own admissions, he overturns nearly every argument which he adduces. Under his first general argument, he says that "the preterite tense in chapter 1st, verse 12th (I *was* king in Jerusalem), refers of course to a *past* time, and it conveys the idea that when the passage was written he was no longer king." But notwithstanding, he admits, in commenting on iii. 15 and vi. 10, also vii. 10, that the same verb in the preter means "what was and still is."

Under his second general argument, Professor Stuart refers to chapter 5th, verse 1st: "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools." He says that in this there is something incongruous with the "condition

and circumstances of him who had built the temple, or made magnificent preparations for offerings." Page 90. This argument he had confuted on page 18, where he says, "The manner in which he (Coheleth) speaks of frequenting religious worship, (referring to the same text,) shows that he speaks of it in a way which would be familiar to those who frequented the temple-service. This contradiction puts the argument at rest.

Under his third general argument, the Professor maintains that the style differs from that of Solomon in the Proverbs. "Brevity, precision, compactness, and energy of expression, predominate" in the Proverbs; while in the Ecclesiastes the style is "here and there expansive and diluted." But Proverbs are, from their very nature, brief, compact, precise, and full of terseness; while a sermon addressed to a popular audience is generally more diffuse and expansive. Prof. Stuart argues that there are the later Hebrew words in Ecclesiastes, which show that the book was written after the age of Solomon. But before he closes the discussion, he makes the following admissions:—"If one will now call to mind how often abstracts are required in a treatise of *philosophy* like the present, he will think it nothing strange, and no special proof of later Hebrew, that such nouns are frequent in Coheleth."

The Professor then adduces eight such abstracts as the only ones that are not found elsewhere, and adds: "The easy and obvious formation of these for the writer's purpose, renders it difficult for us to establish anything from them in regard to *the age* of such forms. The use of them depended, obviously and merely, on the need of them; for the form is altogether *normal* and *analogous*."

Again, he says: "We have, then, after having examined Knobel's list of the later Hebrew words, only a few remaining. Taking the amount of what is left, we find only some ten or eleven cases, which may fairly be brought within the confines of later Hebrew. And some doubt must even hang over these."

After reading all the arguments of Professor Stuart and his admissions, it seems strange that his arguments should satisfy any mind, that Solomon did not compose the Book of Ecclesiastes, or that they should even raise a doubt in the mind of those who read the first verse; "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." Solomon was the only son of David that was king in Jerusalem. "Thus saith the Lord," is better than all the criticisms of the most learned among men.

Dr. Hengstenberg is also an advocate for the same view, viz. that Solomon is only adduced in the Ecclesiastes by some other author "as the ideal of wisdom," "as a representative of wisdom," as "Solomo redivivus." He argues from the fact that the word Preacher (Coheleth) is feminine in the original; that wisdom is meant by it. But with what propriety can wisdom say, "I gave my heart to seek and search out *by wisdom?*" (i. 13). How could wisdom say, "My heart had great experience of *wisdom* and knowledge?" (i. 16). And why should wisdom be called the son of David?

There are many internal evidences that Solomon—not an ideal, but the veritable Solomon—was the writer, or author, of the book. The experience of the writer given in the second chapter, corresponds with what we know to have been Solomon's experience. *He* made him great works;—builded houses, planted vineyards, made pools;—and had silver and gold in abundance. Allusions are also made to his harem, as is pretty evident. The internal evidences that Solomon was the author are by no means insignificant. These, added to the declaration at the beginning of the treatise, are sufficient for humble faith.

THE AUTHOR'S APOLOGY.

Why write a new Commentary on Ecclesiastes? The field of interpretation is open to all. And any "author's best vindication of his vocation to a certain work must, in the nature of the case, be the work itself." The humility which is a part of one's fitness for interpreting God's word, will lead him to have due regard to the opinions of the wise and good men that have preceded him. But the same humility will lead him to sit at the feet of God rather than of man, and to receive nothing as true merely because man has asserted it. To speak lightly of the able productions of others would evince vanity: to imbibe all their views would dishonour God. New views of what the Scriptures teach do not change their teachings; but if those views are right, show that we may ourselves be changed by the truth. We may not modify the teachings of the Bible, but the Bible may modify our opinions, and lead us to reject many things held by wise and good men.

The Book of Ecclesiastes has always been considered among the most difficult to interpret of any of the sacred writings. Among the Commentaries that have appeared, of late years, are those of Dr. James Hamilton, of London, of Rev. Charles Bridges, of England, and of Pro-

fessor Moses Stuart, of America, in the English language. Several Commentaries have appeared in the German language, the most able and evangelical of which is that by Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, of Berlin. This has been translated into English, by D. W. Simon. These all have great merit, but each in its own peculiar way. "The Royal Preacher," by Dr. Hamilton, is not a critical work. It does not profess to be. Nor is it strictly a commentary. It is a cluster of brilliants, characteristic of the gifted writer, and any brow might be proud to wear them.

Far better, however, as a commentary is the work by Bridges. Nor is this a critical work. It does not even give an analysis of the book. But it is full of instruction, and it abounds in gospel truth. A delightful spirit is breathed forth from every page. Prof. Stuart's work is as unlike both these as possible. It is eminently and minutely critical. It displays great learning and research. But for any but learned readers it is worthless, being filled with criticisms on Hebrew words, which none but Hebrew scholars can understand. It was evidently not designed to be a commentary for the people.

Dr. Hengstenberg's work is still more able, but too critical for common readers. The great defect in the work seems to be his assumption that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written during the captivity of Israel to the Persians, and to encourage the captives. This leads him to make many forced and fanciful applications of the teachings of Solomon to things existing at that time. This is a serious blemish in a work otherwise showing the skill of a master. With such eminent Hebrew scholars, the author of the following Commentary would by no means presume to place himself. But he has endeavoured to combine practical instruction with analysis and some degree of criticism; thus adapting the work to all classes of readers.

The author has ventured to put forth some new views as to the teachings of this Book of Ecclesiastes. This he has done, not because he desires to appear original, but because these views *forced themselves* upon his mind. After years of earnest investigation, he has conscientiously adopted them. Others will, perhaps, as conscientiously reject them. Few hours have yielded to the author more pleasure than those spent in examining this remarkable portion of God's word. His labour will not be in vain, if others are profited by any of his suggestions. With an earnest prayer that the work may do good, and contribute to a further

knowledge of the truth, it is committed to those who "delight in the law of the Lord."

The author, though not adopting the general interpretation of any other, would not fail to acknowledge his indebtedness to many early commentators; and more especially to the recent works of Rev. James Hamilton, D. D., Rev. Charles Bridges, Rev. Moses Stuart, and Rev. E. W. Hengstenberg, D. D.

L. Y.

ANALYSIS OF ECCLESIASTES AT ONE VIEW.

CHAPTER I.

VERSES 1, 2. These verses correspond to the title-page of a book or treatise, stating that Solomon is the author, and giving the subject in general terms. (It seems to be an Introduction by some other person than the Author of the Treatise.)

3. This verse is the author's text, or question to be investigated in the treatise following. The question is this: *Of what advantage is this life without another?*

4. In answer, Solomon says: This life, if there is no other, is a mere coming and going of the generations of men;

5–7. And may be compared to the rising and setting sun—the shifting wind—the rivers running into the sea and returning; bringing nothing to pass of apparent importance;

8–11. A labour without a satisfactory result.

12–18. Solomon here presents his qualifications for investigating the subject (12). He was a king over an enlightened country (13). He applied himself heartily and earnestly to the search (14). He had been an observer (15). And he had discovered that earthly help could not correct the evils of this world (16, 17). He had given himself heartily and wholly to the investigation (18). And even in the investigation itself there was grief and sorrow:—another labour with unsatisfactory result.

CHAPTER II.

SOLOMON gives his own experience of the worthlessness of this life (without another), and tells us how he had tested it by seeking good in various things in which men expect to find it.

1–3. In mirth and pleasure.

4–6. In several kinds of improvement.

7, 8. In possessions and music (in wives as some interpret it).

9, 10. Solomon had opportunity to make a thorough trial, and he did so.

11. And he found that there was no profit in life without a future life.

12. If *he* failed to find profit, no other person need seek it.

13–17. He proceeds to show, that, though in itself considered earthly wisdom is vastly superior to folly, there is no advantage (worth naming), even in wisdom, if there is no future; the fame of the wise being transient.

18–23. There is no advantage in laying up estates for heirs, if there is no future state.

24–26. Cheerful enjoyment is all that can be advised.

CHAPTER III.

Verses 1–8. In this life ("under the heaven") God has appointed times for prosperity and adversity, which we cannot change.

9, 10. This seems to be a parenthesis, a return to the great question of the treatise, that the reader may not forget the writer's object, to inquire what advantage this world has irrespective of another.

11. But there is beauty in the whole arrangement could we view the end, each event having reference to a great future.

12, 13. This seems to be another parenthesis, and repeats the recommendation of cheerful benevolence and grateful enjoyment.

14–17. God the universal Sovereign grasps and controls the whole, and will judge all men righteously. Here the great object of the treatise is brought out, *there is a judgment.*

18–21. If there is no hereafter, the condition, life, death, and termination of man and beast are alike; and no one can know that man has any preëminence over a beast.

22. Hence, present joy in one's work is best, as this is all the portion that man has if there is no future. (But there is an intimation in verse 21 that the soul of man rises to God, and the soul of the beast sinks to the earth.)

CHAPTER IV.

VERSES 1, 3. Not only is there no profit, (if this world is the only one,) but there is much grief in life. There is galling oppression, making life a burden.

4. And even righteous deeds are so far from being an advantage, that they bring envy, (resulting in persecution).

5, 6. Idleness, on the one hand; and anxious labour, on the other, yield only sorrow.

7, 8. This is illustrated by the sorrows of the miser.

9–12. The advantages of society and marriage are given as a contrast to the lonely miser's life.

13–16. Rulers, on the one hand, have no real advantage; as their authority is uncertain: and subjects, on the other, have no unalloyed peace; being discontented and fond of change.

CHAPTER V.

VERSES 1–3. Religion itself is no advantage unless spiritual and reverential. Reverence is enjoined upon worshippers, in opposition to rash, hasty, and verbose utterances.

4–6. Vows should be made with caution, and performed promptly, lest God be angry.

7. A *dreamy*, *wordy* religion is vain. But God is to be feared.

8. The oppressor gains nothing, for he will have to account to higher authority.

9–12. The great and powerful are only on a level with others. (9.) They have the same food. (10.) Abundance does not satisfy. (11.) Goods are not enjoyed by their owners more than by others. (12.) The wealthy are often restless, while the tired labourer sleeps soundly.

13–17. Riches laid up in store fail of the object for which they were accumulated. (13.) If kept for the owner's personal advantage, they often prove an injury. (14.) If kept for an heir, the intended heir often fails to get them. (15.) The owner cannot take them with him to the grave. (16.) It is labour for *the wind*. (17.) And sorrow attends his last sickness.

18–20. God's gifts should not, however, be despised, but enjoyed.

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES 1, 2. There is no advantage in mere possession.

3–6. The miser, though he should have many children, and live long, might better be an untimely birth.

7, 8. There is nothing earthly that will satisfy any class.

9. Present enjoyment, however, is to be preferred to longings after what is denied us.

10. The writer here states that he has now named *every thing* that men seek happiness from, and that it is characteristic of man to seek. But he may not, by worshipping earthly things, contend against God.

11, 12. Man cannot find out *now* what is good for himself or his posterity.

CHAPTER VII.

VERSES 1–6. In comparing the states and dispositions of men, we often find what appears *to us* the most undesirable, to be the most valuable.

7. The extremes of being oppressed, and promoted, are both dangerous.

8, 9. Patient, humble waiting for the end, is to be preferred to anger. pride, and impatience.

10. It is not wise to be discontented with our lot, as though the past had been better than the present.

11, 12. *True* wisdom is valuable.

13. No one can make his earthly lot without a crook in it.

14. Adversity must accompany prosperity in this mixed scene, according to God's appointment, that man may find nothing on earth to explain the enigma of life.

15. Accordingly, rewards (in this life) are not according to merit. (From this we must infer a future.)

16, 17. If you live for this life merely, take a medium course, between strict and uncompromising virtue and great wickedness; as this will preserve from martyrdom on the one hand, and from self-destruction on the other.

18. But the truly pious man shall, notwithstanding, come forth in the end as gold unharmed of the furnace. (There is a future reward.)

19, 20. Imperfect as the best of men are, their piety is a better defence to their hearts than many mighty men are to a city.

21, 22. Even the words of slander and malice will not grievously affect them.

23–29. Solomon's search after wisdom and happiness—in this world, had resulted only in a painful discovery of human wickedness and human woe.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERSE 1. Heavenly wisdom changes the very countenance of its possessor.

2–5. Rulers are to be obeyed, in view, (1st) of a Higher Power to whom we appeal in oaths of allegiance; (2d) of the control which they can exercise; (3d) of the safety of obedience.

6, 7. Man's misery is increased by his ignorance, and disregard of opportunities.

8. Especially by his inability to escape the power of death.

9, 10. Solomon had seen that power and influence are not the things that can profit. Their possessor is often injured by them while he lives, and he is forgotten when dead.

11–13. Though because God's judgments delay, men may take occasion to sin; yet final awards will be meted out according to character.

14, 15. The present unequal awards, (if there is no future,) indicate that the main business of life should be to take enjoyment in the things of sense.

16, 17. The most earnest search of the wisest men, to find out divine things by earthly, (though causing loss of sleep day and night,) fails to accomplish the object.

CHAPTER IX.

VERSES 1–3. Solomon had found this, and he now declares it, that the righteous are safe happen what will; though from outward things it could not be found out whether God loved or hated any particular persons. He then gives an emphatic testimony to the corruption of the human heart during this life.

4–6. In view of his probation, the meanest *living* man has the advantage of the most distinguished man that has died.

7–10. Therefore we should make the best of life while we may.

11, 12. Advantages do not always avail, and promised good brings a sudden snare. This is illustrated by the catching of fishes and birds.

13–18. Individual influence is great in its results; but the benefit and the injury are not always shared in this life by the individual himself.

CHAPTER X.

In considering the great question, what profit is there in life without another life? Solomon proceeds to show that:

Verses 1–3. Wisdom, though of great value, is not so complete in this life as to ensure a reputation free from blame.

4. Loyalty is a duty, though the ruler should be exacting.

5–7. There is incompleteness in human government, rulers often erring in their appointments through want of discrimination.

8, 9. And yet attempts at revolution are attended with great danger.

10. If we would be *successful*, we must be wise in the means employed, as well as industrious, and thus disarm opposition. (The next verse also teaches the same lesson.)

11–14. Let us not intrust matters to those that may betray us;

15. Nor to the ignorant and inexperienced.

16, 17. We have here a contrast between inexperienced and intemperate rulers, and the opposite.

18. A government, (compared to a house), falls to ruin by inattention on the part of the rulers (and people).

19. Feasting and wine may make rulers merry; but the country must have something better than merry rulers. It must have money-resources.

20. Disloyalty should not exist, even in thought.

CHAPTER XI.

In this chapter the great object of the treatise comes boldly out to view, namely, that there is to be a future award—that *this life is preparatory to another.*

Verses 1–6. Do present duty on all occasions, and during life, disregarding threatening obstacles; trusting to God for a reward. This is illustrated; (1,) by casting bread-corn upon the waters; (2,) by giving portions to many; (3,) by the clouds and falling timber; (4, 6,) by sowing and reaping; (5,) by the unborn infant.

7–10. Use God's gifts with reference to rendering an account. And provide against future misery. The sum of the chapter is this: *Do* and *enjoy* with reference to a *future award!*

CHAPTER XII.

VERSES 1–7. To avoid future evil, remember your Creator in the youth of life, as the most favourable time; because old age brings sorrows; (2,) of mind; (3–5,) of body; (6,) ending in death; (7,) the body returning to the dust, and the soul to God. (This closes the treatise.)

8. (Here Solomon's editor seems to resume his remarks with an appendix;) using a repetition of chapter 1st, verse 2d; (with which he closed the preface).

9–10. The Preacher's qualifications for giving instruction, were, his wisdom and assiduity.

11. Wise men's words, as coming really from God the great Shepherd, stimulate like a goad, and penetrate and fasten like a nail.

12. Men should, therefore, be admonished by the teachings of the wise, rather than have the attention taken up with the thousand profitless and wearisome things written by the foolish.

13, 14. The whole is summed up (in this answer to the question, "what profit hath a man of all his labour?") thus: *The whole profit of man is to be pious and obedient, and to thus prepare for the Judgment.*

THE

WORDS OF THE PREACHER,

THE

SON OF DAVID,

KING IN JERUSALEM.

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2 *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*

---

3 WHAT PROFIT HATH A MAN OF ALL HIS LABOUR WHICH HE
TAKETH UNDER THE SUN?
4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh:
5 but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also riseth, and the sun
6 goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind
goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north: it
whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according
7 to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not
full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they re-
8 turn again. All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the
9 eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The
thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is
done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing *under*
10 *the sun*. Is there anything whereof it may be said, "See, this is
new?" it hath been already of old time, which was before us.
11 There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be
any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall
come after.
12, 13 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem; and I gave
my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things
that are done *under heaven:* (this sore travail hath God given to

14 the sons of men, to be exercised therewith.) I have seen all the
works that are done *under the sun;* and, behold, all is vanity and vex-
15 ation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight;
16 and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with
mine own heart, saying, "Lo! I am come to great estate, and have
gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Je-
rusalem:" yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and
17 knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know
madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.
18 For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth know-
ledge increaseth sorrow.

II. I said in mine heart, "Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth;
2 therefore enjoy pleasure;" and, behold, this also is vanity. I said
3 of laughter, "It is mad;" and of mirth, "What doeth it?" I
sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine
heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what
was that good for the sons of men which they should do *under the*
4 *heaven* all the days of their life. I made me great works; I builded
5 me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards,
6 and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits; I made me pools
7 of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I
got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house;
also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that
8 were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me also silver and gold,
and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me
men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men,
9 as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and
increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my
10 wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I
kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my
heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my
11 labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had
wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold,
all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was *no profit under*
the sun.

12 And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly:
for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that
13 which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth

14 folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in
his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived
15 also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my
heart; "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me;
and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, that
16 "this also is vanity." For there is no remembrance of the wise
more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is, in the days
to come shall all be forgotten: and how dieth the wise man? as
17 the fool. Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought
under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of
18 spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken *under the*
sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.
19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet
shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured,
and wherein I have showed myself wise *under the sun.* This is also
20 vanity. Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all
21 the labour which I took *under the sun.* For there is a man whose
labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man
that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion.
22 This also is vanity, and a great evil. For what hath man of all his
labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath *laboured*
23 *under the sun?* For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief;
yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.
24 There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and
drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.
25 This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can
26 eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth
to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy:
but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that
he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity
and vexation of spirit.

III. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose
2 *under the heaven:* a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to
3 plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill,
and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time
5 to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones to-
gether; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6 a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast

away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence,
and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of
war, and a time of peace. (*What profit hath he that worketh in
that wherein he laboureth?* I have seen the travail which God
hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it). He hath
made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world
in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God
maketh from the beginning to the end. (I know that there is no
good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good
of all his labour; it is the gift of God). I know that whatsoever
God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any
thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before
him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath
already been; and God requireth that which is past.

And, moreover, I saw *under the sun* the place of judgment, that
wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity
was there. I said in mine heart, "*God shall judge the righteous and
the wicked:* for there is a time THERE for every purpose and for
every work." I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the
sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might
see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the
sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the
one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that
a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go
unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit
of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I per-
ceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in
his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to
see what shall be after him?

IV. So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done
under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and
they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there
was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the
dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet
alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been,
who hath not seen the evil work that is done *under the sun.*

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this

a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation
5 of spirit. The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own
6 flesh. Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands
7 full with travail and vexation of spirit. Then I returned, and saw
8 vanity *under the sun*. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, "For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?" This
9 is also vanity; yea, it is a sore travail. Two are better than one;
10 because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he
11 falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?
12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better is a poor and a wise child, than an old and foolish king, who
14 will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.
15 I considered all the living which walk *under the sun*, with the sec-
16 ond child that shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

V. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider
2 not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore, let thy words be few.
3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a
4 fool's voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools:
5 pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest
6 not vow, than thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice,
7 and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting
of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter:
for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be
9 higher than they. Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all: the
10 king himself is served by the field. He that loveth silver shall not
be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase:
11 this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that
eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the
12 beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring
man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of
13 the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I
have seen *under the sun*, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof
14 to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail; and he be-
15 getteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth
of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and
shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his
16 hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so
shall he go: and *what profit hath he that hath laboured for the*
17 *wind?* All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much
sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to
eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he
taketh *under the sun* all the days of his life, which God giveth him:
19 for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given
riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to
take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of
20 God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; be-
cause God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

VI. There is an evil which I have seen *under the sun*, and it is com-
2 mon among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth,
and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he
desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a
3 stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. If a man
beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of
his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also
that he have no burial; I say that an untimely birth is better than
4 he: for he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and
5 his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover, he hath not

seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the
6 other. Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath
7 he seen no good: do not all go to one place? All the labour of man
8 is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what hath
the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to
9 walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the
wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.
10 That which hath been IS NAMED ALREADY, and it is known that
it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than
he.
11 Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man
12 the better? For who knoweth what is good for man *in this life*,
all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for
who can tell a man what shall be after him *under the sun?*
VII. A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of
2 death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house
of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end
3 of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better
than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is
4 made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;
5 but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear
the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools:
6 for as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the
7 fool. This also is vanity. Surely oppression maketh a wise man
8 mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. Better is the end of a thing
than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than
9 the proud in spirit. Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for an-
10 ger resteth in the bosom of fools. Say not thou, "What is the
cause that the former days were better than these?" for thou dost
not inquire wisely concerning this.
11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and *by it there is profit* to
12 them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a
defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom *giveth life*
13 to them that have it. Consider the work of God: for who can
14 make that straight which he hath made crooked? In the day of
prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also
hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should
15 find nothing after him. All things have I seen in the days of my

vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and
there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.
16 Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why
17 shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not overmuch wicked, neither
18 be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? It is good
that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw
not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall *come forth* of them all.
19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which
20 are in the city. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth
21 good, and sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all words that are
22 spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also
thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed
23 others. All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, "I will be
24 wise;" but it was far from me. That which is far off, and exceed-
25 ing deep, who can find it out? I applied mine heart to know,
and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things,
and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and mad-
26 ness: and I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is
snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall
27 escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. Behold,
this have I found, *(saith the Preacher, counting one by one, to find out*
28 *the account);* which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man
among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those
29 have I not found. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made
man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

VIII. Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation
of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the bold-
2 ness of his face shall be changed. I counsel thee to keep the king's
3 commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not
hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he
4 doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is,
there is power; and who may say unto him, "What doest thou?"
5 Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a
wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

6 Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, there-
7 fore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not
8 that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There
is no man that hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; nei-

ther hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

9 All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done *under the sun:* there is a time wherein one man ruleth over
10 another to his own hurt. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were for
11 gotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.
12 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear
13 God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

14 There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity.

15 Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing *under the sun*, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him *under the sun.*

16 When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day
17 nor night seeth sleep with his eyes): then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done *under the sun:* because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea, further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

IX. For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by *all that is before*
2 *them.* All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth
3 an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done *under the sun*, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons

of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live. and after that they go to the dead.

4 For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a
5 living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any
6 more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done *under*
7 *the sun*. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine
8 with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.
9 Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee *under the sun*, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion *in this life*, and in thy labour
10 which thou takest *under the sun*. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

11 I returned, and saw *under the sun*, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of
12 skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

13 This wisdom have I seen also *under the sun*, and it seemed great
14 unto me: there was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bul-
15 warks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that
16 same poor man. Then said I, "Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are
17 not heard." The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than
18 the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

X. Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for
2 wisdom and honour. A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but
3 a fool's heart at his left. Yea, also, when he that is a fool walketh

by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that
he is a fool.

4 If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place;
5 for yielding pacifieth great offences. There is an evil which I have
seen *under the sun*, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:
6, folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have
seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the
8 earth. He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh
9 an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall
be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered
10 thereby. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then
must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.
11 Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is
12 no better. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the
13 lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words
of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous
14 madness. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall
15 be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? The labour of
the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not
how to go to the city.

16 Wo, to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes
17 eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the
son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and
18 not for drunkenness! By much slothfulness the building decayeth;
and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.
19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money
20 answereth all things. Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought;
and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall
carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

XI. Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after
2 many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou
3 knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. If the clouds be
full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree
fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the
4 tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall
5 not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou
knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do
grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest

6 not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy
seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest
not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both
shall be alike good.

7 Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to
8 behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them
all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be
9 many. All that cometh is vanity. Rejoice, O young man, in thy
youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and
walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but
know thou, that for all these things *God will bring thee into judg-*
10 *ment!* Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil
from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.

XII. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while
the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt
2 say, "I have no pleasure in them;" while the sun, or the light, or
the moon, or the stars, be not darkened; nor the clouds return after
3 the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease
because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be
4 darkened; and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the
sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of
5 the bird; and all the daughters of music shall be brought low: also
when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be
in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper
shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his
6 long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the
silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher
be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.
7 Then shall *the dust return to the earth as it was:* AND THE SPIRIT
SHALL RETURN UNTO GOD WHO GAVE IT.

8, 9 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity. And moreover,
because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge: yea,
10 he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The
Preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written,
11 was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and
as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one
Shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making
12 many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God, and keep**
his commandments; for this is the WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.
14 For God shall bring every work into **JUDGMENT,** *with every secret*
thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

COMMENTARY ON ECCLESIASTES.

CHAPTER I.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains, 1. *Mention of the author, and his general subject*, (*by some other person probably*, verses 1, 2,) 2. *The text or subject of inquiry*, (verse 3,) *in which the author institutes the inquiry*, Of what advantage is this life without another? 3. *An illustration of the worthlessness of all human interests without another life*, (verses 4–11.) 4. *Solomon's qualifications for investigating the subject*, (verses 12–18.)

Analysis. Ver. 1-11.

VERSES 1, 2. These verses answer to the title-page of a treatise or book; giving the author, and the general subject.

3. This verse is the text, or question to be investigated, viz.:—Of what advantage is this life without another?

4. It is a mere coming and going of the generations of men;

5–7. and may be compared to the rising and setting sun,—the shifting wind,—the rivers running into the sea and returning again, apparently bringing to pass no worthy result:

8–11. a labour unsatisfactory and resulting in no good.

EXPOSITION.

1. *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*

2. *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*

These verses, and also the closing verses of the Book, (viz. xii. 8–14,) seem to have been inserted by a different person from the writer of the treatise. He was equally inspired, it is true; but there are strong evidences that another person, (call him, if you please, the editor,)

wrote these first and second verses as an introduction,—and the last seven verses of the twelfth chapter as a suitable conclusion,—to the Book of Ecclesiastes. See remarks on this subject in the Preface, where it appears that it is not uncommon for the Sacred Books to be supplemented by those who did not write them.

The term *Preacher* (in the Hebrew *Coheleth*) is found seven times in this treatise, (viz.: i. 1, 2, 12; vii. 27; xii. 8, 9, 10.) In all of these instances he is spoken of in the third person, and by the editor of the treatise, except in the twelfth verse of the first chapter, where he speaks of himself, and in the first person; "*I the Preacher* was king over Israel in Jerusalem." The word signifies the *Assembler*. But the *assembling* has reference to giving instruction to those assembled, and therefore "Preacher" is perhaps as good a translation as could be given. In xii. 9, it is said, "because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge." He taught his own people, it may be, in a public manner. And he taught the people of other lands who came to hear him. "And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart." Why may we not consider this a discourse delivered by Solomon for the instruction of those who assembled to hear him, from his own and from foreign lands?

The second verse is a general statement, calling the attention to what Solomon said, without precisely pointing out its bearing on the whole of the great theme discussed. The editor allows Solomon to do this in his own words; which he does in the next verse.

3. *What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?*

This verse may be regarded as the key to the whole treatise. This having been overlooked by expositors;

they have failed to bring out in its force and beauty the connection of the parts, and the pertinence of many passages. Some have strangely supposed that the key (or text) is found in the middle of the discourse, viz. vii. 15. But is it not much more natural to suppose that an inquiry placed at the very beginning, contains the essence of the whole, the text? Here then we find the key by which to unlock the door. Here we find a clue to the mine of golden ore which lies hidden in this field. What then is the meaning of the inquiry? In order to ascertain this, it is necessary to look particularly at the phrase, "under the sun."

The frequency with which this phrase is used in this Book of Ecclesiastes shows that it was deeply impressing the mind of the writer. He uses the phrase not less than twenty-eight times, and sometimes twice in the same verse. And it is a phrase peculiar to this Book; not being used in any other part of the Bible. Is it unreasonable then to suppose that the writer was laying especial stress upon the idea, whatever it was, conveyed by words so oft repeated? No doubt he was all along contrasting labour taken "under the sun" and profit "under the sun," with the labours taken for another world, or the rewards of another world. Our common phrase for worldly things and labours is *sublunary* things and labours; i. e., things and labours *under the moon*. Solomon's inquiry then is equivalent to the question, What profit hath a man of all his sublunary labours, or rather, of all his labours for sublunary things?—for this life? In other words, his inquiry is, *What advantage is there in this life irrespective of another? What advantage has life without another life?* And by degrees, as will appear, he prepares the mind of his auditors for the great announcement, *there is a future reward!*

With this view, there is a freshness and beauty about the Book of Ecclesiastes, that is truly enchanting. The enigmas and riddles of the book all seem to be solved. And the treatise of Solomon stands out prominent, an argument for a God, for immortality, for future rewards. If the great object of the sermon is kept in view, all the parts harmonize and constitute a beautiful and connected whole, vindicating the government of God from the common assaults made against it.

Let us bear in mind then that this question is the great topic, implying that this life is incomplete without another, and hinting that there must be another or future life.

4. *One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.*

The original is more forcible than the translation with its supplied words. "Generation passeth and generation cometh." If there is no future, the coming and going of men, generation after generation, is of little consequence. It is just a stage, or mere drama. It is a farce,—there is nothing real. There is no result worthy of the great Author of all things. To suppose that the present is the only life, would be to suppose that God had failed to make what is worthy of himself. And *man*, so far from being the most important, would be less important than the earth on which he lives so short a time. He comes and goes, "but the *earth* abideth for ever," that is, so far as nature teaches. It *seems* to abide for ever. Solomon does not teach that the earth will never be destroyed. But "as compared with man's passing away, it *abideth ever*."—*(Bridges.)* It abideth through the whole course of time; longer than men. If man's labour terminates on earthly things, and he perishes when he dies; then the true order is reversed;—man is not immortal,

while the earth *is* immortal. The earth is the abiding stage, while human life is a coming on and going off, a mere passing scene, soon to terminate without any important result. "*What profit?*"

5. *The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*

6. *The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north: it whirleth about continually; and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.*

7. *All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full: unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*

Here we have a comparison between several natural phenomena in their apparent barrenness of results, and human life or the succeeding of one generation by another.

Indeed the Hebrew word or letter *vav*, here translated "also," is often used to make a comparison. (See Gesenius's Lexicon, Job v. 7. "Man is born to trouble *as* (*vav*) the sparks fly upward," xiv. 19: "(so) thou destroyest the hope of man," xii. 11; xxxiv. 3; Proverbs xxvi. 9.)

We may ask, what good is brought about by generation after generation coming on the stage of life and passing off again, and being no more? just as we may ask, what good is apparently accomplished by the sun rising and setting in a constant round; and the wind whirling about continually; and the rivers running apparently with the view of filling the sea, but never accomplishing it, and returning again? Nothing seems to be accomplished. The sun of this morning is where it was a century ago,—it has made no progress. The wind of this day is as it was last year—what has it brought to pass? The Nile of this year overflowing its banks, is but a repetition of

the process of every year. It seems to have done nothing. There is a monotonous repetition of the same thing. So is man, as though he were reproduced from generation to generation, to run the same round of pain, and folly, and life, and death, and disappointment. *What advantage has life without another life?*

Without a future life, generation following generation is little better than the sun of to-day following the sun of yesterday; and one gust of wind blowing after another; or the mighty tide of the Euphrates or the Nile flowing continually into the sea. The days may differ somewhat. One may be clear and another cloudy. The wind may blow, now a gentle breeze, and now a hurricane;—now from one point of the compass, and now from another. The rivers may now glide quietly along between their banks; and now, swelling into mighty torrents, overflow the surrounding plains. But after all, it is just a coming and going, a shifting and turning, a labour without satisfaction;—"*the sea is not full.*" Why this circling sun? why this mighty force of wind, repeating the same thing again and again? Why this expenditure of waters? There is still a sense of want:—there is no satisfactory result. So is it with human life, if there be no hereafter. It is just a coming and going of men, without any important object. Some ages may be darker, and some more enlightened;—the wind of doctrine may blow—now in this direction—now in that;—the tide of empire may set in, first for one nation—next for another; for Egypt, for Babylon; but there is much labour and no permanent profit. There is no profit in such a life, unless it is preparatory to another.

But Solomon is preparing the way, even in this comparison, to show that there is to be a grand and glorious result, in the far-off future. And he brings it out, espe-

cially in the eleventh chapter, by similar figures. The Nile, or any other river, is not a mere waste of waters; but the bread-corn is cast upon it which shall be found after many days, in a glorious harvest. (See exposition of xi. 1.) The changing wind brings up the clouds to scatter their fatness on the furrowed fields, (xi. 3.) And the sun is not a mere racer, running around its circuit merely to return to its goal to go over the same "magic circle of vanity;" but it fills the world with light and joy, (xi. 7.) And so the generations of men are not a mere coming and going with no result. But the soul lives for ever. It is true that "the dust shall return to the dust as it was," but "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (See exposition of xii. 7.)

In saying "unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again," Solomon exhibits his acquaintance with true philosophy. The Psalmist says of the waters, "They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them." (Ps. civ. 8.)

8. *All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*

Here the great theme is continued. "What profit" is there in this world in itself considered? In the constant labour and toil for something to satisfy; speech, and sight, and hearing, all fail. There is no satisfying portion! "This universe does not yield an eye-full, an ear-full, to its occupants."* In his thirst for something new by which to satisfy his cravings, man seeks out many inventions. But they all fail. "Nothing goes on with vigour and freshness: spur and whip are everywhere necessary: the world seems to have outlived itself, for ever since the

* Hamilton.

time spoken of in Genesis iii., it has been under 'bondage of corruption,' (Rom. viii. 21)."*

9. ¶ *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.*

10. *Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.*

Past existences are like the future: and past and present doings are but what future doings are to be;—like those that are to come. The present and the future yield and will yield no more real satisfaction than the past. *In this sense* there is and will be "no new thing under the sun." There will be nothing *to satisfy*. Some imagine that Solomon erred in supposing that there would be nothing new under the sun. They point to the improvements and inventions of the present age, and hold them up in triumph as contradicting Solomon. But Solomon was himself an inventor, and well knew whereof he affirmed. He did not assert that there were and would be no new discoveries in science, no new inventions in the arts, but that there was and would be no new *earthly* thing—no thing *under the sun* to satisfy the wants of man. It is as though he had said to a restless ambitious aspirant after some untried panacea to satisfy the heart; "that *new thing* which you are seeking, by which to satisfy your desires, you *can never find*. There is no such new thing;—no such *under the sun*." This implies that there is, *above the sun*, so to speak, or in heaven, a satisfying portion. This expression, "under the sun," here again used in this connection, confirms us in the interpretation of the third verse. "What profit—under the sun?" Ans.—There is nothing new under the sun to yield profit. So far as profit is concerned there is nothing new.

* Hengstenberg.

11. *There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.*

We, of this generation, forget that former things proved unsatisfactory to the seekers and finders; and we are apt to suppose that hereafter something satisfactory may be found. But future things will be in this respect like the past; and an age still more distant will forget that they were so,—that they yielded no real profit. The idea seems to be, that men misjudge both of the past and future, thinking that the present alone is unsatisfactory. They think that "former days were better than these;" and that future days will also be better. The buzzing discontented ephemera of Tuesday forget that the ephemera of Monday found no brighter sun, no more genial wind, and no clearer river than those where they now sport: and the disappointments of Wednesday's ephemera shall be forgotten by those of Thursday. Men are but ephemera, whose duration is only a little longer, and whose memory runs only a little further back. And if there be no hereafter, they are but little better than the insect of a day. "What profit—?" These instructions are only preparing the way for the great doctrine of a future judgment, and a future reward. This will appear in future chapters. Solomon is reasoning as Paul reasoned a thousand years after. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not?" (1 Cor. xv. 19, 32.) "What profit hath a man" if there be no other life? *There must therefore be a future.*

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *This apparently monotonous and unsatisfying life is big with glorious results!*

That would be but a simpleton or a careless observer, who should complain of monotony and uselessness in rising and setting suns; in changing winds; in flowing streams. The child may suppose that the sun is only to ornament the sky, and the wind to shake the leaves, and the rivers to try to fill the sea without doing it. But the sage will see ten thousand harvests ripening into maturity under the sun's cheering beams, and the nations rejoicing in its light. He will see the rivers refreshing the valleys through which they run, and the bread-corn cast upon the overflowing Nile springing up to supply the millions with food. In the wind he will see God's messenger carrying to the regions parched with drought the condensing vapours, to be poured in fatness on "the lap of earth." And so he will see in human life, not a mere mockery of being, generations rising to perish again; but men with immortal souls to mature on earth for mansions above.

God is in nature. "He maketh the clouds his chariots, and walketh upon the wings of the wind." "He maketh his messengers winds." (Ps. civ.) As truly as the angel was a messenger to destroy the Assyrians, so truly was the wind—the tempest which destroyed the Spanish Armada—the messenger of God to save England from the power of Popery and the Inquisition. Nor was the shifting wind a hundred years after less remarkably a messenger of God for England. William, Prince of Orange, was to be the ruler of England. As his vessels were nearing England, Macaulay says, "Crowds stood in Cheapside gazing intently at the

weathercock on the graceful steeple of Bow Church, and praying for a Protestant wind." That wind came, and wafted William with his six hundred vessels filled with soldiers to England. It blew strong from the east, exactly in the right direction while the Prince was sailing down the British Channel. "It turned to the south when he wished to enter Torbay; it sunk to a calm during the disembarkation" of the troops; "and, as soon as the disembarkation was completed," it rose "to a *storm*," and met the pursuers in the face and turned them back. England was again saved by the wind. So the events of human life are working out a great future destiny. A sun shall finally arise that shall never go down. How happy are they who shall enjoy its beams! There may *seem* to be no profit in life. But there is a preparation going on for eternal life or eternal death! The harvest is being matured. The vessel is being wafted into port. The ocean of eternity is nearing. O there is another life. "Prepare to meet thy God."

II. Though there is nothing "new" in earthly things to satisfy the soul, *new things are in store, which will satisfy.*

Something new we need;—we must have. We must have given us a *new* heart. We must be made *new* creatures in Christ Jesus. We must have a *new* song put into our mouths, even praise to God. We must come to God by a *new* and living way. We must be called by a *new* name, which the Lord shall name. Yes, God says, "Behold I make all things *new*." "There shall be *new* heavens and a *new* earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Happy will they be who enter the *new* Jerusalem; who shall drink of the *new* wine; and sing a *new* song before the throne, in company with the redeemed.

O ye who seek after novelties; ye who inquire with the old Athenians if there is any thing new; let me tell you, that "there is no *new* thing *under the sun*." Ye who, in an endless round of pleasure and folly, seek to consume time, let me say, all that you can find on earth falls infinitely short of your desires. Hundreds before you have found all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. And you will find the same. But let me also say to you,—try that which is new from heaven. Seek the *new* heart. Seek the new and living way to bliss. Seek Jesus who came from above, and has gone back above all worlds. There is no other name given under heaven and among men whereby ye must be saved.

Your eyes have never been satisfied with seeing. But when they shall be permitted to behold the beauties of the house above, they shall be satisfied. "The king in his beauty" will be the great object of attraction, when you shall "see him as he is."

Your ears have never been filled with hearing. But they shall be filled. You shall listen with rapture to the harps of the redeemed; and the voice of Him who now speaks peace to the comfortless, will welcome you to his own bright Paradise. Sweeter than an angel's lute will be his words of welcome.

Analysis. Verses 12–18.

In the following verses Solomon presents his own qualifications for investigating the subject presented in the inquiry, *What advantage hath this life if there be no other?*

VERSE 12. He was king over an enlightened people.
13. He had applied himself heartily and earnestly to the search.
14. He had been an observer.
15. And he had discovered that the evils of this world and its deficiencies could not be corrected and supplied by human means.
16, 17. He had evidence from communion with his own heart that he had given himself wholly to the investigation.
18. And in the investigation itself he had found grief and sorrow.

EXPOSITION.

Solomon was making original investigations, with the question before him, What profit is there in this life without another life? What compensation do the labours of life afford, if this is our only home? He may have had a mixed audience, composed partly of Israelites and partly of those, who, like the queen of Sheba, had come from abroad, to see his magnificence, and to hear his wisdom. He would not let the favourable occasion slip without giving them important spiritual instruction, as he was inspired to do. Like Paul at Athens, he would adapt his instructions to his hearers, and not quote the Scriptures, nor argue from things known only to the people of his own nation.

Solomon chose to argue for *immortality* irrespective of the Scriptures then written, and to prove a *future* in another way. The histories found in Genesis, Joshua, Ruth, and Samuel;—the laws of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy;—the triumphs of virtue after struggling with difficulties, as in the case of Job; and the devotions of his father's heart and harp in the Psalms;—all pointed to the rewards of a future state.

But Solomon would present to his audience his own *original* investigations on the subject. And here we have, in his own words, his qualifications for making these investigations.

12. ¶ *I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*

He here speaks of himself in the first person,—"*I* the Preacher;"—I who now address you. This is very different from the first and second verses, where "the Preacher" is spoken of in the third person. And this corroborates the idea advanced, that the first and second verses were written by another, and as an introduction to the discourse of Solomon. He here adduces the high position which he occupied, as a great advantage which he had for investigating the subject. He was a *king;* and consequently had great resources at his command, and servants to do his bidding. He was king over *Israel;* then the most enlightened nation on earth. He was king in *Jerusalem;* the city where were concentrated the learning and piety of the nation, and where David had dwelt and reigned. The next chapter shows what use he had made of his opportunities. Prof. Stuart argues from the expression, "I—*was* king," &c., that Solomon was not the writer, because he thinks the præterite tense implies that he had ceased to be king; and Solomon continued to be king while he lived. But the præter does not refer wholly to the past, but embraces the present, as Stuart elsewhere admits. Hengstenberg, one of the ripest scholars of this or of any age, says, "The use of the præterite is no argument against Solomon's being the author of the book. The præterite is very frequently employed in descriptions of a past which stretches forward into the present, and therefore is it remarked, with perfect justice, in the Berleburger Bible—'I the preacher

have been king thus far, and am one still: to him therefore there has been no lack of opportunity of trying experiments and of getting experience.'" Indeed, if we admit that the writer was speaking of the past only, it is plain that it was perfectly natural for him to say, "I tried my experiments in the most favourable circumstances—I was king over Israel in Jerusalem." This by no means implies that he had ceased to be king.

13. *And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.*

He entered enthusiastically into the investigation. He gave his *heart* to it. "Concerning all things that are done *under heaven*." "Under heaven" is equivalent to the oft repeated phrase "under the sun." Solomon gave his heart to seek and to search out all things done for this life. And he found that it was not only vanity, unsatisfactory, but "*sore travail*."—"This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man (Adam) to be exercised therewith." There appears to be an allusion here to the effects of the fall of Adam. The writer does not say sons of *men*, but "sons of *man*," (in Hebrew, "sons of Adam.") The sons of Adam, the transgressor, have this sore travail. They labour and travail, in vain, to find something that will satisfy the soul. *What profit?* "All that takes place beneath the sun belongs to the sphere which had its origin in the fall of man, is tainted with sin, and is attended by sin's fell train of suffering and punishment. Everywhere the earth shows itself to be a scene of vanity."*

* Hengstenberg.

14. *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun: and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Solomon here gives his extensive observation and experience of the efficacy of this world to yield a reward. And from this verse to verse tenth of the sixth chapter, he names the various worldly things which might be supposed to yield profit. "I have *seen all* the works that are done under the sun"—done with reference to this life only,—"and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And after giving in detail his observations—what he had *seen*, he says, (vi. 10) "That which hath been is *named* already." That is, I have now *named*, or already *named everything* that men seek happiness from of an earthly nature; in answer to the question, "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" (i. 14, "I have *seen* all:"—vi. 10, "I have *named* all.") Solomon had an excellent opportunity of observing, among his people, among his courtiers, and among those who came to his court from foreign lands to hear his wisdom; what men were generally seeking after, and what good this world was able to afford them. And the result was, that he found all to be not only "vanity" but "vexation of spirit." The original is expressive. "Vexation of spirit," means the *breaking*, *bruising*, and *crushing* of spirit, as in a *mortar!* This whole passage strikingly corresponds with Paul's presentation of the creation in Romans viii. 20–22. "The creature was made subject to *vanity*." "The whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now." It is true that Paul taught in the same connection the glorious future—"the redemption," as he calls it. He taught that the creature is to be "*delivered* from the bondage of corruption." And Solomon teaches the same before he closes, but less clearly.

This world is vanity, says Paul; but there is deliverance, —there is a better. This world is vanity, says Solomon, if there is no other; but there is another. Thus Scripture corroborates and interprets Scripture. The present state of things is one of "bondage and corruption," of pain and anguish. But in the days of Solomon there was less relief. The Jewish religion had the same comforts to impart as the Christian, it is true; but the light thrown upon the plan of salvation in the New Testament is clearer than that of the Old Testament. And happy are our eyes that see this glorious day of gospel light!

In all ages man is miserable because fallen! There is "a dreadful pressure of sin and misery on the whole creation." As an *individual*, man's heart is not at rest. His soul is the seat of torturing passions and corroding cares. His body is subject to disease and death. In his *collective* capacity, he suffers from wars, famine, pestilence, storms and earthquakes. Man's depravity and misery explains the next verse.

15. *That which is crooked cannot be made straight; and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.*

That which is perverted, turned upside down, destroyed, cannot be placed in order. This describes man's fallen nature in its revolution and destruction, as unable to be changed by human means. "And that which is wanting cannot be numbered;" or that which is deficient cannot be made up. What is wanting to man's happiness on earth cannot be supplied by means known to this world. If the evils of life could be mended, there would be hope. But reason and philosophy have been appealed to in vain. The crooked things of sin cannot be made straight by any human art; and what is wanting to happiness cannot be supplied from human resources. The more we obtain, the

more we desire. The question still returns, "*What profit?*"

Only *one* thing can satisfy; and Solomon was not inquiring about *that*, for his inquiries were about things "under the sun." This whole subject may be illustrated by a chain. The several links of a chain may be crooked, but the chain itself straight. He whose vision extends not beyond *one* link, would straighten that link, not knowing that the chain is held together by the crookedness of the links. So the chain of providence is straight, though the parts seem to us crooked, and we fret and vex ourselves that we cannot make the parts accommodate our desires. Could we see the whole chain, we should rejoice at what we now think crookedness and imperfection.

16. *I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.*

Solomon here repeats his qualifications to investigate the subject, and tells how his own mind was exercised in the matter. This he does, not in the spirit of boasting, but to inform his hearers that he had with heart-communings and diligence made his observations of things pertaining to this subject. He said to his heart, "Lo, I am come to great estate;" or I have become great, or grown great. The Hebrew word גדל *gathal* here translated "come to great estate," may refer to Solomon's becoming great in wealth, or great in dignity. But as he was presenting his qualifications for investigating the question of the value of the things of this life, it is likely that he referred to his great wealth, his abundant resources. When Abraham's servant related to Bethuel and Laban Abraham's wealth, he said, (Gen. xxiv. 35,) "The Lord hath blessed my

master greatly, and *he is become great :*" (gathal.) He then showed that his greatness consisted in flocks and herds, in silver and gold, in men-servants and maid-servants, in camels and asses. But authority may also be included, as the word has this meaning also. (See Gen. xli. 40.) Pharaoh says to Joseph, "Only in the throne will I be greater than thou."

Solomon also said to his heart, "I have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been in Jerusalem before me." He refers to his varied learning, as greater than that of all his courtiers and the wise men in his presence. He does not refer to his father who had reigned in Jerusalem, or others who had existed there before his time; but to those who were *in his presence before* him. (לפני *le-pani.*)

"Yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." In the next chapter, Solomon relates with great fulness what his experience had been. Perhaps there is but little distinction between the words *wisdom* and *knowledge*. If there is any in the original, it is about the same that it is in the translation :—wisdom refers more to native power of mind,—knowledge, to acquired furniture of mind or information. But the wisdom of which Solomon here speaks is not the wisdom spoken of in some other parts of this book, viz., the fear of the Lord, or piety. This wisdom has reference to things "*under the sun.*" "Its efforts are only directed to search out and fathom what takes place under heaven: the wisdom which cometh from above strives" to seek out the things pertaining to salvation.

17. *And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.*

Madness and folly are contrasted with wisdom and

knowledge. Solomon, like our first parents, would know evil as well as good by his own experience. And the very knowledge of all these things was a vexation of spirit. Ignorance would have been comparative bliss, as the next verse declares. By wisdom, as an instrument, Solomon had investigated other things: now he examines the instrument itself. With this he also examines its opposite—folly. "Contraries explain each other."

18. *For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

This is not said of wisdom in its best sense—of the knowledge of God—of saving knowledge. But it is said of the wisdom of this world. And four reasons may be assigned why this kind of wisdom is unsatisfactory and tends to sadness. 1. There is hard labour in acquiring it. 2. After all our search, the mind is still in doubt about many things. 3. Painful discoveries are made of the wickedness and misery of men; and human wisdom finds no remedy, (v. 15.) The heart alive to the distress of sin, is in perpetual grief. 4. The mind becomes more susceptible to pain by the increase of knowledge. *What profit?*

Those who have great knowledge of men, who have made extensive research into the character of mankind, discover that men are false, unfair, perverse, and wicked. It cannot but give them excessive pain and grief to see all this and not be able to rectify it. "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Divine power and love can straighten what otherwise is incurably crooked.*

Sin is crookedness. Righteousness is something according to rule: and sin is the reverse—it is a departure

from rule. That which is altogether fallen and depraved, as the heart of man is, cannot be cured by philosophy. All the ingenuity of men cannot supply what is wanting. There is no remedy! Solomon was not the only one that has found it so. His mirth, and wine, and houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards, pools, servants, cattle, silver, gold, and music, left his soul unsatisfied and perverted. Even his wisdom did not rectify his disordered heart. This was the breaking and crushing of his spirit. All was wrong, and no remedy appeared. And how often has the burdened sinner felt the same. The earnest cry is,

> "O where shall rest be found,
> Rest for the weary soul?"

And learning, philosophy, even natural religion, can only answer, *Where?*

This world is "crooked." It is *perverted, revolutionized, destroyed!* Since the fatal hour of the *fall* it is a ruined world. Suffering is great and wide-spread. There is miasma in the air; there are agents of death lurking in the ground. The little infant is not innocent enough to escape the destroying angel. Men's minds are inflamed with envy, jealousy, hatred, and other vile passions that break forth into bloodshed and war. Man becomes the deadly foe of man. The very elements often combine against him.

"He is hemmed in, thwarted and arrested on all sides. Restrained on either hand, there are instruments lying ready all around for his punishment; and these are often wielded by a hand of fearful irresistible strength, or set in motion by latent powers possessed of electric velocity."*

Improvements and genius do not rectify disordered

* McCosh.

hearts. Refined Greece and Rome were little or no better than barbarous Gaul and Britain. Italy, with her painting and statuary unrivalled by any other people, is the abode of licentiousness. Architecture cares not whether her best polish is given to a Christian temple or a heathen pagoda. There is no regenerating element in the arts and sciences in themselves considered. Is there then no hope?

Blessed be God, the crooked *can* be made straight. That which is wanting can be supplied. God has undertaken what man could not do. He has undertaken to rectify the most oblique and crooked of all things, the human heart. What he undertakes he will accomplish. Though it should require the sacrifice of his own Son, he will redeem man from ruin. Though in order to this it requires the union of the Godhead with manhood, he will do it. Though it should require the third Person of the Trinity to come and dwell in the shattered temple of the human soul, he will do it. Now, for the sad and disconsolate heart,—for the crushed and broken heart,—for the sinful and depraved heart,—there is comfort, and healing, and life. The weeping Christian will yet enjoy a paradise. And the groaning, bleeding creation will yet be renovated, and enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The gospel of Christ teaches more than philosophy can teach. It teaches the way of salvation through the atoning blood of the Son of God. It points to heaven and shows the way.

II. *It cannot be said of true wisdom that it increases grief.*

And there is much real pleasure in the investigation of many things pertaining to this life. In the search and acquisition of knowledge the student often feels abun-

dantly repaid for all his pains. When he discovers some great principle hitherto hidden in the depth of unexplored mystery, like the Grecian philosopher, he exclaims in rapture, "Eureka, eureka;" "I have found it—I have found it." Astronomy fills the soul with sublime and glorious visions. Beautiful images spring up and greet the inquirer, in all the walks of nature. Even mathematics compensates with a beautiful solution for the tedium of the process. But especially are we profited (if our hearts are attuned to it) with the studies which revelation lights up with its own blessed radiance. The religion of the Bible imparts light and beauty to all the sciences. It opens up immortality! Take away the doctrine of a future state, and a dark pall rests upon science as well as upon religion, and we feel intense sadness that all that is beautiful and promising is so soon to perish unknown and forgotten.

In our search after knowledge, the question meets us, "How can man be just with God?" No response comes up from the deep abyss of human wretchedness. The more we know of the real situation of men, the greater our sorrow. And then if we have no remedy to offer, our sorrow is intensified. Howard's heart would have been crushed had he not been able to some extent to relieve the miseries which he found in European dungeons; and had he not hoped to reform the evils which he saw. So, had we not a gospel to offer to the miserable sinners of mankind, their perishing condition would overwhelm the heart with unmitigated grief. But the Christian religion brings a remedy. It brings life and immortality to light. It gives a glorious hope to the soul borne down with the griefs of life. And the pains of dissolution are forgotten in the foretaste of heaven. In the increase of true knowledge, there is joy. If no guilt rests upon our

consciences, light from above gives peace. In the light of the "Sun of Righteousness," our earthly pathway is filled with radiance. And on the bright shores of the heavenly land, the Lamb shall fill all heaven with glory. Jesus is the way to the Father, and the light of heaven. In heaven, increasing knowledge will give increasing joy.

CHAPTER II.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains, 1. Solomon's trial of various supposed good things of this life, to ascertain whether they had any value in themselves considered, and his estimation of them after the trial. 1–23. 2. A recommendation of the cheerful enjoyment of the good things of life, and a contrast between good and bad men in their enjoyment of this world, 24–26.

Analysis. Ver. 1-12.

Solomon gives his experience in various proofs or tests, by which he sought to ascertain what advantage life has without another life. He inquires what profit there is:—

Verses 1–3. In mirth and pleasure:
4–6. In improvements:
7, 8. In possessions and in music:
9, 10. Solomon states how he had opportunity to make a thorough trial, and that he had made it;
11. And he found that there was no profit in life without a future.
12. If he failed to find profit, no other one need seek it.

EXPOSITION.

1. *I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity.*
2. *I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?*
3. *I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, (yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom;) and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.*

Solomon's first test of things that might be supposed to be profitable, was of mirth, pleasure, laughter, wine and folly. His plan was to test these, still however acquainting his heart with wisdom. Who can imagine the hilarity that pervaded his court at the time specified! Probably,

to make his experiment perfect, the wits and merry-makers of all Palestine were collected and entertained at the royal palace, by his bounty and at his expense. Certainly Solomon's household was prodigious; and some of the members may have been mere courtiers and gay companions, while others were charioteers, artizans and other workmen. "Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and three-score measures of meal, ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, besides harts, and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer, and fatted fowl." 1 Kings iv. 22, 23. To consume such an amount of provisions it would take probably thirty or forty thousand persons.

As Solomon and his courtiers feasted and made merry, the people generally caught the contagion of the court. "Judah and Israel were many as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." 1 Kings iv. 20. No doubt, God was to a great extent forgotten in Solomon's court; and intemperance, to some extent, prevailed. It was a scene of mirth, pleasure, laughter, feasting, folly! The courts of princes have often been the scenes of similar folly. The courts of Henry VIII. of England, and of Louis XIV. of France, were remarkable for the stupendousness of their folly.

It does not appear that Solomon himself drank to intoxication. His language is, "I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting my heart with wisdom." He tried an *experiment* to see if in this there was any profit, anything satisfactory. It is not with this view that so many indulge in intoxicating drinks;—it is rather to gratify a base appetite. Wine has its uses. Unfermented wine may be taken as a beverage with impunity. Even fermented wine may be taken as a medicine. But danger lurks in the intoxicating bowl! And Solomon was

aware of the danger. In the days of his communion with God he wrote, "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Prov. xxiii. 29–31. Perhaps the clause "when it moveth itself aright" might be rendered, when it ferments, or is fermented. There is commotion, movement, in fermentation. The adverb, "aright," (in the original *mesharim*,) may be translated, in smoothness, in peace. Fermentation is a peaceful operation,—it is a *peaceful motion*. Turn away from fermented wine. Some of the saddest scenes on earth have been those of intemperate folly—*bacchanalian revelry*. And drunkards cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.

But Solomon's life was not *all* a life of pleasure. We turn now to the useful and the pleasurable combined.

4. *I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards;*

5. *I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits;*

6. *I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees.*

Here we have an account of Solomon's *improvements*. He made "great works;" viz., he built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and orchards and pools. "From the lust of the flesh Solomon now passes to the lust of the eye, and to that pride of life which delights in, and understands how to procure for itself, outward splendour."*

* Hengstenberg.

Solomon built *one* house in the early part of his reign that was the glory of all lands. This was the temple. But he does not here refer to the temple, as is evident from several considerations. He did not build the temple for the purpose of testing what profit there was in things under the sun, but for a very different purpose. Besides, he says, "I builded me houses," or "I builded houses *for myself*." He did not build the temple for himself, but for God. He refers to the houses that he built for his own convenience and pleasure. An account of these is given in the seventh chapter of 1 Kings. His own dwelling-house was thirteen years in building. It is called "the king's house" in 1 Kings ix. 10. And he built "the house of the forest of Lebanon." This was so called because the timber was brought from the forest of Lebanon, not that it was situated in Lebanon. This appears from the fact that his throne was in the porch of it; and his shields were there. It was 150 feet long, 75 wide, 45 high; upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. Solomon also built a house for Pharaoh's daughter, who was one of his wives. It was built of costly stones. Besides these, he built large and beautiful cities; Millo, Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Beth-horon, Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness. He built also the walls of Jerusalem. As to Tadmor, (Palmyra or the Palm-tree city,) its ruins are still the objects of wonder and admiration. It is said that no remains of Grecian or Roman architecture can compare with them in magnificence. There are countless Corinthian columns of white marble standing and fallen. As they rise to the view of the approaching traveller, in their solitary grandeur, amid deserts of sand, they produce an impression of solemn awe.

Who built those ancient cities deserted and forgotten, only recently discovered, in the great desert east of the

river Jordan, whose magnificence was beyond that of any modern city; it seems impossible to ascertain.

Besides his skill in architecture, Solomon understood horticulture and gardening. "I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits." These enterprises were lawful and right. Fruit conduces greatly to health and comfort. Solomon's orchards were paradises, as the original is; *i. e.*, parks of beautiful trees. But they were fruit-trees, and therefore our translation is not at fault.

Solomon also made for himself pools of water, to water therewith his orchards. Modern travellers have shed light upon this subject. They find the remains of these pools, three in number, several miles south-west from Jerusalem. Dr. Robinson gives a minute description of them, though he does not admit that any allusion is made to them in the Bible. They are "huge reservoirs built of squared stones, and bearing marks of the highest antiquity." They were built in a steep part of the valley, rising one above another, so "that the bottom of one is higher than the surface of the next below, rising one above another towards the west." Flights of steps led down in various places into all the pools. The length, breadth, and depth of the pools are as follows:

Lower,—	Length,	582	feet.—	Breadth,	207.—	Depth,	50
Middle,	"	423	"	"	250	"	39
Upper,	"	380	"	"	236	"	25

The greatest breadth is here given, the pools all being broader at one end than at the other. An aqueduct runs along the northern sides, giving off water to each pool. An aqueduct also leads from these pools, three miles to Bethlehem, and originally to Jerusalem.

The work of constructing them must have been immense, for the age; and no doubt it was the work of Solo-

mon. Robinson thinks that the principal object of these pools was to supply Jerusalem with water. He says, "they may have served also to irrigate the gardens in the valley below; but this could hardly have been their main object. Yet there is no mention of them in the Scriptures."* But Dr. Robinson forgets that they are here mentioned as constructed expressly "to water the wood that bringeth forth trees." Ver. 6. Perhaps Robinson adopted the modern error that Solomon did not write the Ecclesiastes. If so, it accounts for his saying that "there is no mention of them (these pools) in Scripture." They were built to water Solomon's nurseries. This seems to have been the main object. And the fruitfulness of the region is still worthy of mention. Josephus tells us that Etham was distant about fifty furlongs (6¼ miles) from Jerusalem; "very pleasant it is in fine gardens and abounding in rivulets of water." He says that Solomon used to go out there "in the morning sitting on high," (*i. e.*, in his chariot.)†

Thus Solomon made great improvements, and no doubt found as much satisfaction in making them as in possessing them when made. But he had also *great possessions*, as appears from the next verses.

7. *I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me.*

These servants, male and female, Solomon procured, to wait upon his person and those of his courtiers, and to attend to all the menial offices of his house. The Hebrew word *kanithi* often means *to buy*, but may also be translated *get* or *procure*. It determines nothing as to whether Solomon had purchased them as slaves or procured them

* Vol. i. § vii. p. 515. † Antiquities, book viii. chap. vii. § 3.

for service, giving them a compensation for their labour. "And had servants born in my house;"—literally, "There were to me sons of the house." This "was the softer Hebrew appellation of slaves." It designates "such as were born of bond-women in the houses of their master; for, by universal custom, the children followed the condition of the mother."*

Solomon had also great possessions of cattle and flocks, above all that were in Jerusalem before him, *i. e.*, in his presence. There was not a man in Jerusalem so rich as he was.

8. *I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men-singers and women-singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.*

An account of Solomon's riches may be found in 1 Kings x. 14–29. From that chapter it appears that the weight of gold that came to him in a single year was 666 talents. If a talent was worth fifteen hundred dollars, (as is estimated,) then his revenue in gold amounted to nearly a million of dollars annually. This was in addition to what he got in traffic with the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country.

By "the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces," is probably meant the rare and curious things that kings have power to procure from their various provinces. Some suppose that the silver and gold before mentioned are meant by the peculiar treasure of kings. Hengstenberg seems to give the true interpretation when he says, the peculiar treasure "does not signify property in general, but something of special value and highly estimated, strictly, that which men lay by, lay on one side, treasure."

* Stuart.

He supposes, "the kings" mentioned to be those of vanquished heathen countries. That there were such vanquished heathen countries tributary to Solomon seems plain from 1 Kings iv. 21, 24: "And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms, from the river (Euphrates) unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents (another name for tribute,) and served Solomon all the days of his life." "He had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphsah even to Azzah (Gaza,) over all the kings on this side the river." These provinces therefore were not the several tribes of Israel. Stuart, following Gesenius, says that the word translated "provinces" belongs "to the later Hebrew only." But may not the word have been in use in Solomon's time *in those countries* tributary to Solomon, though not as yet used in Israel? In Esther the word is used for the Persian provinces. The word is found in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, as applied to Eastern provinces and satrapies. May not Solomon have used the word as one well known to the nations that he subdued, though never used by previous Hebrew writers?

But further, Solomon loved music, and indulged his taste in securing the services of singers, "men-singers and women-singers." To these he added, according to our translation, those who could play on instruments, providing musical instruments for them, "and that of all sorts." Music was wont to accompany feasts. Isa. v. 12. But eminent critics render the words which are translated "musical instruments and that of all sorts," *a wife and wives*. They suppose that Solomon referred to his true queen and his other wives and concubines. Gesenius, Stuart, and Hengstenberg thus translate the words *shaddah* and *shaddoth*. The daughter of Pharaoh was his lawful wife, his true queen. But he loved and married many

strange women. This was his great sin. But he was tempted to this by the custom of the kings of the nations. And he was trying every experiment to find out what profit there was in worldly things,—things "under the sun." So he had his harem like other princes, and enjoyed "the delights of the sons of men" (of Adam.) This evidently refers to Solomon's love of women, which betrayed itself in his "seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines."

If, however, we follow our translation, Solomon delighted greatly in sweet music. We may imagine that when he retired to rest, the rich strains of music came stealing softly on his ear lulling him to sleep. When he awoke, he was again saluted with notes of melody. When he returned from his morning ride amid his parks and gardens, fine-toned instruments of music poured forth their greetings. Perhaps when sad and dejected, (as he often was,) he remembered how his father's harp drove away the evil spirit from king Saul; and he called for his minstrel. And in the midst of his merry feasting, the voice of festive song rose loud and gay from the lips of mirth. And if the days of his innocent childhood ever came into his thoughts, may we not suppose that he sometimes called a favourite musician, (one pious man of a thousand in his court, vii. 28,) to chant one of the sweet psalms of his father, which he had loved in the home of his youth? Such a strain would check his folly, and lead him for the moment to better aspirations.

9. *So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me.*

Solomon increased in wealth and influence, more than any other man then in Jerusalem. "Before me" as in the first commandment, means, in my presence. "Also my

wisdom remained with me." This remark, with others of a similar kind, upsets the theory of those who suppose that Solomon was in a state of mind bordering on insanity. See Mahan's criticisms on Ecclesiastes.

10. *And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.*

Solomon gave himself fully to the work of testing the value of every seeming earthly good. "This was my *portion* of all my labour." He sought to dismiss the idea of a future state, and to make trial of this world as the only portion of man, that he might test whether there were any advantage in it. The next verse gives us the result.

11. *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*

He then took a careful survey of the whole; and the question of his text was unanswered. He had asked, "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" He now answers from his own experience,—There is *no* advantage,—"There is no profit under the sun." Life with its highest joys is profitless, is no adequate portion without a higher end—without another life.

12. ¶ *And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done.*

Solomon could adapt himself to all the circumstances of life, and "turn" himself to look at the bearing of his pursuits upon his happiness, and he did. He looked at

wisdom, at madness, at folly. He tried the experiment of seeking good in this world only, as no other man had it in his power to do. Hence he says, "What can the man do that cometh after the king?" After a king with such advantages for making the experiment, it was useless for any other one to seek profit in this world, leaving out of view another. He had come forward as a representative man, and had decided the matter *for all* and *for ever*. "Solomon in all his glory" was unable to find real advantage in this world. Admired for his wisdom; his kingdom being at peace; having riches, servants, cattle, parks, airy mansions, wits and musicians contributing to his pleasures; and having a magnificent seraglio; he needed nothing that earth can give. He omitted nothing that could be done to secure good. And the man that cometh after such a king can do only "that which hath been already done." There *must* therefore *be a future*, or the problem of human life is unsolved.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *In the best worldly things we have the mere shadows of happiness.* Solomon tried the best as well as the worst. He tried *mirth*. But mirth is but a shadow of the bliss of heaven,

> "Where pleasure rolls her living flood,
> From sin and dross refined."

The most costly and magnificent *buildings* are but hovels compared with "the mansions of glory,"—with the "building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Forests of choicest trees, and lovely parks, are but unsightly, compared with the paradise where grows "the tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruits every month," *i. e.*, *continually*.

Pools are "broken cisterns" compared with the "river of the water of life."

Gold of Ophir is dross, compared with "the riches of glory."

And what were the *songs* and *music* of well-tuned instruments, whose melody filled the palaces of Solomon, compared with the high praises of God on harps above, in the strains of the redeemed? There are the "harpers harping with their harps," saying, "Worthy is the Lamb."

Heaven alone will give true satisfaction. While we are "under the sun" our joy is transient. Mirth without religion is "like the laugh of the hyena among the tombs." "I said of laughter, it is mad; and of mirth, what doeth it?" The poor labourer who loves God and looks forward in hope to a promised heaven, is happier than Solomon in his mirth, and wine, and feasting; in his parks, and gardens, and musical entertainments. His marble palaces, and gushing fountains, and terraced gardens, and spicy groves, could not ease the pangs of conscience, or dry up one falling tear. "There is no profit *under the sun*."

II. *Instead of envying the prosperous, we should patiently wait in faith and hope for "the good things to come."* The most satisfactory enjoyment here is in communion with God, and in sweet expectation of a future happy life. Men of mirth are not always the most happy. Colonel Gardiner before his conversion, Theodore Hook, Mathews the comedian, and Lord Chesterfield, are examples of men who to others seemed happy, but in whose agonizing hearts was a worm gnawing in silent perseverance. Jesus alone can relieve the aching heart. Forgiveness of sins may be found in him. HE gives a peace which the world cannot give. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you; let not your heart be troubled." Mirth here ends

in tears. Pleasure fosters a viper's sting. Wine biteth like an adder. Our pools are broken cisterns. Our riches make to themselves wings. All things disappoint. But heaven fills the soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory. David's greater Son there sits upon his throne dispensing blessings. His servants are angels. His trees are trees of life. His pools are the water of life. His "peculiar treasures" are his *people*, who shall be jewels in his crown. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, when I make up my jewels." His musicians are redeemed sinners, who tune their harps to redeeming love; and angels cannot sing so sweet a song as they.

Analysis. Verses 13-26.

Solomon continues to discuss the great question of *worldly advantage.*

VERSES 13–17. He shows that earthly wisdom, though vastly superior to folly in securing worldly advantages, has no permanent advantage if there is no future state; the fame of the wise being transient.

18–23. Laying up estates for children, gives no permanent advantage.

24–26. Cheerful enjoyment is all that can be advised respecting this world.

EXPOSITION.

13. *Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.*

Solomon would not have us understand that *for this world* wisdom is no better than folly. He had found the contrary. Light did not more excel darkness than wisdom excelled folly. Wise men seem to foresee the future. They reason, and weigh probabilities, and gather from the past lessons for the future. Hence they are far more likely to succeed in worldly things than others are.

Others are like men groping their way in the dark. They are always stumbling. Consequently they are rarely successful in their enterprises. The next verse illustrates the same idea.

14. *The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.*

Two advantages arise from our eyes being placed in the *head* rather than elsewhere. First, they are so elevated thereby that we can see objects at a greater distance than we otherwise could; hence tall men have an advantage over those who like Zaccheus are small of stature: second, by the pivot in the neck, the head (and hence the eyes) can be turned to any direction. So the wise man looks far ahead at the consequences of his conduct, and also all around him at the advantages and difficulties of his position. But the fool acts as though his eyes were in his heels, where they have but a very limited view, and as it were but in one direction. He exposes himself to constant danger. "See then that ye walk circumspectly. (looking around,) not as fools, but as wise." Eph. v. 15.

But though there is this difference in favour of the wise, so far as it regards this world; yet Solomon saw that they finally shared alike. "And I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all." This was the mystery. This "one event" was death. So far as warding off the shafts of death is concerned, wisdom is no better than folly, and if there be no hereafter all share alike. ix. 2.

15. *Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.*

In this light wisdom has no advantage over folly. My being wiser than others is no final advantage to me, and

if there be no hereafter, my wisdom is only "vanity." In the next verse the sentiment is fully brought out.

16. *For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? As the fool.*

The wise and the foolish die alike, and are forgotten alike. Worldly wisdom is not therefore that valuable possession which solves the enigma of life. As valuable as it is for this world, it does not yield such permanent good as to answer the question of what advantage is life without another life?

17. *Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Solomon, in this view of life, hated it as a cheat and a delusion. The work wrought for this world merely was grievous, and vanity and vexation of spirit. "What profit——?"

18. ¶ *Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.*

19. *And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.*

20. *Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun.*

21. *For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity, and a great evil.*

22. *For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun?*

23. *For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.*

If wealth secured by worldly wisdom does not benefit the possessor after this life ends, another question arises.—Is there not a satisfaction in laying up wealth for one's self and for one's children? Solomon answers, no; for two reasons:—First, I shall soon leave all; second, a fool may then possess it who will reap no advantage. Solomon therefore hated all his labour which he "had taken under the sun" (for this world.) He would soon leave it to another. Alas! how short our lease to what we call our own! And a fool might rule over all that he had acquired in his wisdom.

It is possible that Solomon makes allusion to his own son Rehoboam, who may already have given evidence of folly, arrogance, and obstinacy. He therefore went about in despair of obtaining any good "under the sun," for the man who by wisdom, knowledge, and equity secures property, leaves it to one that has had no trouble. In the 22d verse he comes back to his text—the starting-point of his inquiry—"What hath a man," or "what profit hath a man of all his labour?" This frequent returning to the original question, confirms us in the opinion that verse 3d of chapter 1st is the great question under discussion. Sorrow and grief, day and night, deprive the man who lives for this world of his rest. Accumulation brings care and unrest rather than satisfaction.

24. ¶ *There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.*

This passage (24–26) perplexes those who suppose that Solomon is inquiring what is the chief good. It is indeed a strange conclusion that he arrives at, if this is

the inquiry of the book. But if we consider the question discussed, what advantage is there in this life without another? then it is not inappropriate to say, "There is *nothing* (in this life) better for a man, than that he should eat and drink," &c.

25. *For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?*

Solomon here refers to his own experience of this kind of earthly good. He could enjoy it if any one. Compare verse 10. Hengstenberg says, "Between the enjoyment mentioned in v. 10, and that referred to here, there is this difference, that the latter may be the portion of the man who has but small means."

26. *For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Here is a distinction made between a good man and a sinner. The difference is brought out more fully afterward. See Chapter viii. 12, 13. There is really no harm in eating, and drinking, and enjoying the good things of this life, if we do all to the glory of God. It is in dissipation, and folly, and forgetfulness of God, that the evil consists. And the wealth of sinners procured by great pain and travail, is made to bless afterward the people of God. The wisdom, knowledge, and joy which God gives to those that are good in his sight, are, no doubt, spiritual wisdom, knowledge, and joy; to be consummated in heaven. Perhaps a distinction is intended between God-given wisdom, and that previously mentioned which yields no advantage.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *It is important that our influence should follow us into the future, though our names should not.*

Solomon laments that there will be no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever. In the days to come they shall alike be forgotten. Most men would wish to be remembered after their death. But not more than one in ten thousand are remembered after about the fourth generation. And it is far better to be forgotten, than like Eratostratus to set fire to the temple of Diana for the sake of handing down one's name to posterity. Many have gained an unenviable immortality for their names, by deeds of wickedness. But to a man who believes not in a future state of existence, it is a sad thought that his name, too, will so soon be forgotten. The righteous however will never be forgotten. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." Sometimes, even on earth, the humble, pious man is long remembered. Bishop Horne says, "When his work is done, his body will go to its repose in the dust; but the memorial of his name and good deeds will be still fresh as the morning breeze, and fragrant as the flowers of the spring." Abel "being dead, yet speaketh." Thousands of righteous Abels have since shed lustre upon their own age, and that lustre has shone into the future, guiding in the way of holiness many an anxious traveller. "Enoch walked with God." Many Enochs have been stimulated by the example to enjoy similar communion. Abraham's faith has been put on record for our imitation. He was the father of believers; and his sons have through faith done deeds of glorious daring. Joseph's purity has prompted many to refuse to "sin against God." The love of David and Jonathan has been a model for other loving hearts.

Hannah and Eunice training their sons for God's service, have inspired multitudes of mothers to give their Samuels and Timothys to God, and train them for just judges and pious ministers of the gospel. We have in the Bible the brief story of a man who would not otherwise have been known to fame. But in the two verses that comprise his history, we learn an important lesson. Born in sorrow, Jabez became a man of prayer, and faith, and influence. 1 Chron. iv. 9, 10. There is another, whose humble service for her Saviour shall be told to her honour while the world shall stand. It was Mary. She poured on the head and feet of Jesus precious frankincense. Its fragrance filled the room. And the fragrance of that deed of love has been wafted through the Christian world, and it will fill heaven itself with its odour. In heaven the deeds of all the righteous will be remembered. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." While the righteous shine as stars, Jesus is the glorious sun in the firmament of heaven. The biographies of millions have not been written, who will be held in everlasting honour. When the deeds of many mighty princes and chieftains shall be remembered no more except to be condemned, God's humblest children will be objects of undying interest. God has found a place in his *own* memory, and in the memory of the *redeemed*, for the humblest of his people. The memories of loved ones will be one ingredient in the bliss of heaven. The cup of cold water—the word of kindness—will be recalled with gratitude and joy. Let us so live as to leave behind us a name, and especially an influence for good.

"Peace to the just man's memory, let it grow
Greener with years, and blossom through the flight
Of ages; let the mimic canvass show
His calm, benevolent features; let the light

Stream on his deeds of love that shunned the sight
Of all but Heaven; and in the book of fame,
The glorious record of his virtues write;
And hold it up to men, and bid them claim
A palm like his, and catch from him the hallowed flame."

The Christian's life is not a failure. And though "there is no profit *under the sun*," there is profit in works done for God and heaven.

II. *Property should be used with reference to a future life.*

What shall we do with wealth? is often a more difficult question than, how shall we obtain it? To provide a competence for those dependent on us, if we are able, is a Christian duty. But poor indeed will be our children if they enjoy our houses and lands, and know not the God of their fathers. God is the portion of the good. But "upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the *portion* of *their* cup." How sad for parents to provide such a portion—such a cup for their offspring when *they* sing with the Psalmist, "The Lord is the *portion* of *mine* inheritance, and of *my cup!*" Yet how often do Christian parents put a bitter cup to the lips of those dearer to them than life, by neglecting to point them prayerfully to the inheritance above! Solomon's heart, no doubt, felt keenly sad in tracing the progress of his imbecile and arrogant son, now thirty or forty years of age. He looked in vain for some sign of promise. Yet his houses, pools, vineyards, orchards, nay his kingdom itself, now brought to the highest pitch of prosperity, was soon to be possessed and managed by his foolish Rehoboam. But what wounded his heart most deeply was, that his *own* youthful folly had brought about this state of affairs. He had not himself loved the worship of Moloch and Milcom, but

his too susceptible heart had been captivated by the charms of one who did. And he wedded the fair Naamah, an idolatrous Ammonite, by whose blandishments his heart was turned away from God to her own base and cruel idolatry. 1 Kings xi. 4–8. It was under the influence of such a mother that the young foolish prince Rehoboam was reared. "Yet," says Solomon, "he shall have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured and showed myself wise under the sun." It was a bitter reflection! Could he have seen the results, he would have seen Israel's sun setting in darkness over a divided kingdom!

But with great confidence we may seek for God's blessing upon our children, if we show them that we love them too well to sacrifice them at the shrine of this world. Solomon would doubtless have given his kingdom for a wise and pious son. Let us not seek for ourselves or ours a portion that will perish.

"In its true light this transient life regard:
This is a state of trial, not reward.
Though rough the passage, peaceful is the port;
The bliss is perfect, the probation short."

Hannah More.

CHAPTER III.

CONTENTS.

This chapter advances step by step from the inference *that there is a future judgment, in the question, "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" to a decisive* declaration *that there* is *a future judgment. This declaration comes out in the seventeenth verse. As the rewards of* this life *are unsatisfactory (the argument is) there must be a future, where all will be made right. The first eight verses of this chapter teach that in this life ("under the heaven") events are all appointed by Providence. And various specifications illustrating this truth are given. This view of Providence makes it still more evident that man's reward is not here, for labour as he may, sorrow as well as joy, disappointment as well as success, follows. Hence, Solomon reverts to the original question, with a slight modification, in the ninth verse: "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" And then he reverts again to his own observation, as it were in an undertone, ("I have seen the travail," &c., as stated in the second chapter,)* Ver. 10.

He next shows that all these things have a bearing on the future in that eternity to which all things are made beautifully to contribute (11) *and that God the universal Sovereign grasps and controls the whole, and will judge all men righteously.* (14–17.) Verses 12, 13, *are parenthetical.*

In the last part of the chapter (18–21) *we are taught that on the supposition of there being no hereafter, man is no better off than the beasts that perish, and should enjoy this life as his chief good. Thus we are brought step by step from a consideration of the worthlessness of this world, and God's adverse providences, to the necessity of a future state and the certainty of a judgment.*

Analysis. Verses 1–17.

As in this life there are times for good and evil, joy and sorrow; all beautiful in their connections, as ordered by Providence; so in the future judgment it will be the time for rewarding "every purpose and every work." Every thing is tending to a great and solemn future.

VERSES 1–8. In this life ("under the heaven," v. 1) God has appointed times for prosperity and adversity, which we cannot change.

9, 10. These verses seem to be a parenthesis, repeating the subject under consideration.

11. This verse, as though immediately following the 8th, says that while there is a time for every thing, there is beauty in the whole arrangement in view of the important end; and each thing and event has reference to the future; though man is not able to grasp the whole.
12, 13. These verses are another parenthesis, repeating the recommendation of cheerful benevolence and grateful enjoyment. See ii. 24.
14–17. God the universal Sovereign grasps and controls the whole; and will judge all men righteously.

EXPOSITION.

1. *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*

If there is any difference between the words rendered *season* and *time*, the former has more reference to the appointment of God than the latter. Hengstenberg says that there is no difference in their meaning. Perhaps, however, the former means, in this place, a time appointed by God, a *set* time; and the latter, a time chosen by man, a *fit* time. God appoints all things, even those which are brought about by the agency of man. But it becomes man to improve his opportunities. *God's appointed season is our favourable time* for accomplishing our desires or purposes, provided those desires or purposes are in accordance with his will. God's foreordination and man's accountability are both taught in this chapter, though short-sighted man sometimes pronounces them inconsistent and contradictory. This verse contains a general proposition, and the seven next following are specifications.

2. *A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.*

God controls the time of our birth and death. Job asks, "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?" Job vii. 1. Some interpreters apply this and the following specifications to *individuals;* some to *the church;* and others, to *nations.* The birth and death of

nations is really as much under the control of God as is the birth and death of an individual. Hengstenberg says, that usage would render the infinitive here translated, "to be born," in the active voice, *to bear*. But though usage may suggest this rendering, *to be born* is the real contrast to the phrase *to die*, and therefore to be preferred. There is a time for individuals to be born, and a time for them to die, so there is a time for nations to rise and a time for them to decline and perish. There is a time for man to sow wheat, and gather a harvest; to plant trees, and to destroy a forest. So there is a time for God to plant a nation, and to pluck it up or destroy it. The Psalmist says to God, in reference to Israel, "Thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst *them*." Ps. xliv. 2. Also, he says of Israel, under the emblem of a vine, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt; thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it." Ps. lxxx. 8. God planted Israel,—he plucked up the nations of Canaan.

3. *A time to kill, and a time to heal: a time to break down, and a time to build up.*

Taken in reference to individuals, this passage means, there is a time for executing criminals, or destroying enemies; and a time for saving life, and healing the wounded. The primary meaning of *to heal*, in the Hebrew, is, *to sew*, and a secondary meaning is to *heal a wound*, which is often done by sewing it. Also, there is a time to break down a house or city, and to build the same.

Taken in reference to nations, the passage teaches that there is a time for God to destroy or to save a nation;—to break it down by his judgments and to build it up with his favour. God says to Israel in reference to his dealings with them as a nation, "I kill, and I make alive: I wound,

and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." Deut. xxxii. 39. In Jeremiah xviii. 7, 9, God represents himself as speaking "concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;—and concerning a nation, or concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it." He alone can "break down" and "build up" a nation.

4. *A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

Times of adversity and of prosperity give rise to weeping and laughing. And the orientals showed their sorrow and their joy by pitiful dirges and dancing. The word translated "mourn," means to mourn in a kind of plaintive song, like that of the mourning women who were employed at funerals for the purpose. The word translated "dance," corresponds with the words "leap, jump, skip." Jesus likens the generation to whom he came, to children sitting in the market-place, and saying to their fellows, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented." There is certainly no warrant in this passage of Scripture for promiscuous dancing.

There are joyful times when weeping would be altogether inappropriate.—"How can the children of the bride-chamber fast when the bridegroom is with them?" And it is equally incongruous to sing songs of joy when in deep affliction.—How could the captive Jews sing the Lord's song in a strange land? It was in vain that their enemies required of them mirth: they hung their harps upon the willows.

This verse seems to apply to individuals rather than to nations; though there are times of national joy and national grief, publicly expressed by the people.

5. *A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.*

There is a time to destroy monuments, and a time to build them. "The statue reared one day will be thrown into the river another, and the trophy commenced by one conqueror will owe its completion to his rival and supplanter."*

Jesus said to his inquiring disciple, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Mark xiii. 2. Hengstenberg says, in applying this to nations: "God scattered stones by the hands of the Chaldeans: through his servant Cyrus he gathered them together." There is "a time to embrace," when friends meet in gladness;—"a time to refrain from embracing," when friends must be separated, by death or otherwise. It is in the Lord's embrace, however, that his church is held when she is true to him; and he repels her from his arms when she apostatizes. The nation that is exalted in righteousness God holds in his arms; the wicked nation he abhors.

6. *A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.*

There are times when men seek earthly gain; there are times when they lose all their treasures. Sometimes they seek the Lord; again they lose the evidences of his love. Sometimes they keep (guard) their hearts with all diligence; and then they cast away their watchfulness. Or, some men keep God's law: others cast away his precepts. But this also applies to the Lord's dealings with men. Sometimes he seeks them out to bless them; and then is the time of his merciful visitation. Sometimes, when after

* Hamilton.

mercies bestowed men continue obstinate and rebellious, he says, "Let them alone." He keeps his people as his peculiar treasure; and he casts away the wicked as dross. That will be a blessed keeping, and a fearful casting away, when Jesus shall say, "Come, ye blessed.—Depart, ye cursed." God keeps one nation, and casts away another.

7. *A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.*

There is a time to rend the garments, in grief, as was customary; and a time to keep silence, for the same reason when grief was excessive, as Job's friends did when they saw his misery. There is also a time to sew the rent garment, when joy is restored; and cheerfully to discourse when sorrow has passed away. This may also be referred to nations, when there is general grief or rejoicing.

8. *A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time of peace.*

There is a time when individuals and nations have feuds, and a time when they live together in harmony. Sometimes God's people are hated and persecuted, and again even their enemies are made to be at peace with them. Sometimes God shows his love to nations,—sometimes his displeasure. Sometimes he scourges them with war,—sometimes he blesses them with peace. How sweet is peace! May all our labours end, as does this list, *in peace*. Life is the fit time,—the set time,—the fixed time,—the ordained time, for us to prepare for a glorious immortality. And man is the more inexcusable for misimproving his times and neglecting his opportunities, in that there is a *set* time for every work.

9. *What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?*

This verse and the next seem to be thrown in as a parenthesis. It is as though Solomon said, ("I wish you to keep the subject on which I am treating in view, viz., that there is no profit in the ever-varying works and scenes of this world. Under the appointment of Providence, man is born, and dies;—he plants, and plucks up;—he kills, and heals;—he breaks down, and builds up;—he weeps, and laughs,—mourns, and dances; but is not profited.") He then adds, as though calling attention again to his own experience as recorded in the second chapter:

10. *I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.*

("I would again remind you of what I have experienced and related of the worthlessness and vexation of life.") Thus Solomon prepares the way for pointing to a glorious *future* as the real object of this life.

11. *He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.*

This is a remarkable passage of Scripture. It has great depth and force, and seems to prepare the way for a full avowal of Solomon's belief in a future judgment. It *is* a declaration of a future eternal state, and of the bearing of the present upon the future. Our translation is obscure, and the English reader has therefore difficulty in understanding it. Our translation would seem to amount to this:—God has made everything beautiful in his great plan, could we see it all: but men are so engrossed in the world that it prevents them from finding out God's whole work. But the original presents a most beautiful and im-

portant idea. Dr. James Hamilton translates it thus. "He hath made everything beautiful in his time, and in the heart of everything he hath set an eternity: so that no man can find out from the beginning to the end any work that God maketh—any process that God conducteth." This free translation probably gives the true meaning. The word rendered "world" in our translation, is rightly rendered *eternity*, or the *hidden time*, (eth haolam.) Many able critics contend for this meaning. Gesenius defines it, "*remote time, eternity, everlasting.*" Hengstengberg says, עולם (*aolam*) is never used in the entire Old Testament in any other sense than of 'unmeasured time' and of 'eternity:' and in this book above all is it employed in the signification 'eternity.'" God hath set the hidden eternity in the heart of everything:—he hath given, as it were, to inanimate things a longing for the future, and a purpose to fulfil a future destiny. Everything has a future errand, and till that errand is done no man can find out anything that God designs to accomplish by it. No one can see "from the beginning to the end," or the whole plan. To every incident God has given not only its immediate effect, but also its remoter consequences, stretching far into the future. God has set eternity in the heart of everything, as he has set in the heart of an apple a seed, which is to produce a future tree. Metaphorically, "heart" means *the middle* or *midst*. Thus Absalom was in the midst (*heart*, Heb.) of the oak. 2 Sam. xviii. 14. "The depths were congealed in the heart of the sea." Ex. xv. 8.

Solomon had sought to make everything beautiful in *his* time; but what was crooked he could not make straight; and he found in the end disappointment. But God makes all things beautiful in *his* time. When he had completed his creation, all things were "very good:"

and he pronounced them so. And at the winding up of all earthly things he will look upon his works, and, as before, declare them "very good." And could we see it all, "from the beginning to the end," as he sees it, everything would appear beautiful to us also. In verses 2–8 many things are mentioned that do not seem beautiful or desirable, but in the great machinery of the universe they all have their place, and further the great, good, "beautiful," glorious whole. As links in the great chain they are indispensable.

12. *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.*

13. *And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.*

These verses seem to be a parenthesis. There is no good for man in earthly things, except to use them joyfully and to do good with them. As man has not his destiny in his own hands, it becomes him to "trust in the Lord and do good." Doing good should always accompany the enjoyment of God's favours, that we may resemble our heavenly Father, who makes his sun to rise on evil and good men, and who sends rain upon the just and the unjust.

14. *I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.*

This verse is connected in sense with the eleventh. As man cannot find out from the beginning to the end God's work, so he can put nothing to it, nor can he take any thing from it. God is independent of men. And yet he uses men as his instruments. His counsels will stand, and he will do all his pleasure. Luther says, "Why does God afflict men with such countless, varied,

and great cares of government, of household, of trade, of business, compelling them to run and race, and ride and drive, and travel by land and water, and often to risk their lives, whilst he has kept in his own hands the right moment when any thing shall take place, and all the rest is in vain? The answer is: In order that men may fear him; that they might keep his first commandment; that he may remain Lord and God, and that all may recognise him to be God: further, that we may all learn thorough and hearty obedience and humility, and begin nothing trusting to our own wisdom, thoughts, abilities; as St. Paul admonishes the Romans in chapter ix. 16, saying—'It is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God, who showeth mercy.' God doeth it that men should fear before him." *The fear of the Lord*, is an expression employed several times in this book, and frequently throughout the Scriptures. It is said to be "the beginning of wisdom." It is equivalent to true piety and religion. The sum of the duty of man is, to "fear God, and keep his commandments." Chapter xii. 13. This fear is not terror. It is a holy disposition of soul whereby we are inclined to obey God. It evinces itself in dreading God's displeasure, in desiring his favour, in admiring his attributes and works, in submitting to his will, in being grateful for his favours, in worshipping with reverence, and in obeying his commands conscientiously. He is a child of God who has this filial fear.

15. *That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.*

This is said of God. He views the past, present, and future, at a glance. God's purposes are unchangeable, and his works are ever before him. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as

one day." There is no deficiency with God—no redundancy. "His work is perfect." He will make all that appears wrong in this world right at last. Here we cast a glance beyond things and labours "under the sun.' We look into God's past and future eternity. "God requireth that which is past"—is rendered by Hengstenberg, "God seeketh the persecuted." He thinks that this translation is in harmony with the other part of the verse, because the Divine prëordination is brought forward as a consolation to the afflicted. He thinks that this fifteenth verse forms a link of transition to the 16th and 17th. But the passage may be translated literally, "God requireth (calleth back) that which is chased away." If applied to time, it means that which seems to us chased away and lost. God's calling it back means his bringing it forward at last as a part of his glorious plan, or as a witness at the judgment. In this view of the subject, the verse also forms a link of transition to the next two verses, which lead us to the judgment. God calls back the past, and connects it in all its bearings with the future.

16. ¶ *And, moreover, I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.*

17. *I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose, and for every work.*

Solomon had seen earthly judges partial and unrighteous; wronging the innocent and clearing the guilty. And God seems to be like them, if we look no further than *this world*. But there is no such injustice with him. Solomon knew that there was a future judgment when all would be rectified; and he now comes (v. 17) to the great utterance of his heart. "*I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.*" The great

idea is here fully brought out, for which he had been preparing the minds of his hearers, viz.: Since there is incompleteness, and crookedness, and sorrow, and injustice "under the sun;" and man labours in vain if his prospects terminate with this life; there *must* be a future judgment of the righteous and wicked; there *is* a future judgment. This future judgment will have its place and time, as well as things "*under the sun*,"—as well as corrupt earthly courts,—as well as our birth, death, joys and sorrows. As there is a time *here* "under the heaven," so there is a time *there* (for judging every work.)

Bishop Patrick says, "The last words of this verse may, in my judgment, be thus most literally translated out of the Hebrew:—'There is time for (judging) every purpose, and every work there.'" But the bishop makes the word "*there*" refer to the corrupt courts of the preceding verse, as though it meant there is time for judging every purpose and work transacted in those courts: whereas, the word "there" seems to refer to the final judgment. "There is a time for (judging) every purpose, and every work, THERE," at the final judgment. The bishop's translation seems to be accurate, but his application of the word "there" is less consistent with the great idea to be brought out, than if applied to the judgment-seat at the great day. May we not imagine Solomon pointing his finger upward as he pronounced this word? "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time THERE for (judging) every purpose," &c.

To recapitulate. Solomon begins with occurrences known to all;—God's sovereignty is seen in our birth, death, sorrow, joy, meeting, parting;—in public events—breaking down, building up, war and peace. Passing over the impotence and helplessness of the creature, he

saw how glorious was that Omnipotence which held in hand the guiding reins of ponderous orbs and mighty incidents, and at the predestined moment would bring the chariot of his sovereignty to its triumphal goal in the far-off eternity. He saw the wisdom which had "made every thing beautiful in his time." And he saw that all things would terminate in a righteous award; that God would justify himself in the eyes of the universe.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *God is a Sovereign, working all things according to his own eternal plan.*

This is one of the great truths of Revelation; and here it is taught with clearness. "Whatsoever God doeth it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." "God maketh (his work) from the beginning to the end." It reaches from eternity to eternity. With whom took he counsel when he planned the universe? Who helps him in the execution of his plans? Angels and men are his instruments. He made them,—he employs them,—and he will award to them their dues. But they cannot add to his essential glory. They cannot stop the progress of his chariot. *We* are surprised at sudden and unexpected events. But "known unto *God* are all his works from the beginning of the creation." He does "what his hand and his counsel determined before to be done." *He* cannot be surprised, for all things are always present to his mind. This is a consoling truth. Is it not much more consolatory to believe that God so arranges human affairs that they cannot be changed for the better, than that the universe is "a mighty maze, and all without a plan,"—than to believe that Providence is taken by surprise at the turning up of events which he did not order; and that the Infinite Mind sees the future only in its dim

and dusky outlines? If there is a clear and indisputable truth in God's word, this is one, viz.: That "God hath foreordained for his own glory whatsoever comes to pass; yet not so as to make God the author of sin, or to do violence to the will of the creature, or to destroy the contingency of second causes." In the arms of such a God we can repose in safety. Such a Father will uphold our footsteps in the hour of danger.

"Chained to his throne a volume lies,
With all the fates of men,
With every angel's form and size
Drawn by the eternal pen.

'His providence unfolds the book,
And makes his counsels shine:
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.
* * *
"Nor Gabriel asks the reason why,
Nor God the reason gives;
Nor dares the favourite angel pry
Between the folded leaves."

II. *Every thing is beautiful, as managed by God for some great end; and having in its heart, as set there by him, a glorious future.* Many objects seem to us *now* anything but beautiful. The storm that breaks the forest and desolates the city is sublime in its terrific grandeur. But to us it is not beautiful. Sickness, and tears, and woe, and death, have no beauty for mortal eyes. Joseph's coat of many colours, in which his young and guileless heart exulted, was once beautiful. But was it beautiful to a parent's eye when besmeared with blood, and rent, and draggled in the dust? No, to Jacob's eye it was the saddest of sights. It made him mourn in sackcloth, and say, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning!"

But could Jacob have seen as God saw;—could he have looked forward and beheld the *whole* as he afterward beheld it, that bloody coat would have been the herald of his son's *promotion;* of his vestures of fine linen; of the golden chain of his office in Pharaoh's court.

And as *we* look upon the toils and crosses and tears of loved ones, beloved of God; we see the precursors of their elevation in robes of white, washed in the blood of the Lamb. If we could see the *whole* instead of a part of God's providence, the dark cloud would be tinged with rainbow beauty. We see but a part of the machinery of the universe; but could we see the whole, the fitting together of every part, and its subserviency to the great whole, it would cause us to admire, as beyond description beautiful the intricate wheels of providences working out one grand and glorious destiny. And there is in every thing *a heart*. Eternity is in that heart. All earthly things, even the most insignificant, are agents in bringing about the glorious consummation, "a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;" or to hasten the terrible infliction on "the vessels of wrath." "Wherever we look, above, beneath, around, within us; on the animated or inanimate creation;—on nature, in her individuals or aggregates—in her minutest particles or mightiest masses, we behold, in each, a design beyond itself,—a scheme not fully developed; a goal not yet reached; an ultimate purpose yet unattained."*

The goal is not yet reached, but we are hastening toward it. And as eternity is in the heart of even inanimate things, how much more should *our hearts* anticipate eternity! Shall immortal man have no higher regard for the future than the beasts that perish? If other things are linked to eternity, how much more is man. Solemn

* Dr. Lewis W. Green.

indeed is our work. Every thing that we do is big with the future. Heaven or hell is created every hour.

III. *We must avail ourselves of the right time to do the work of that time.* Not only has God made everything beautiful in *his* time, but man has *his* time, in which he is to do his work, and to make it beautiful. "There is a time for every work under heaven." (Ver. 1.) As God has chosen the appropriate time to do *his* work, so he has pointed to the proper time in which we are to do *ours*. God has done all his work at the *right* time. The creation of the world,—its destruction by the deluge,—the call of Abraham,—the coming of the glorious Messiah,—the Reformation,—the discovery and opening up of the American continent,—all the revolutions recorded in history,—and the spread of the gospel;—have been in the right time. The millennium will take place,—the world will end,—and the judgment day will come, at the right time.

But God has called on us to do *our* work in the right time. We must sow in seed-time if we would reap a harvest. And we must sow to the Spirit while the Spirit strives with us, if we would reap life everlasting. Before he closes his sermon, Solomon tells us what is the right time to serve God. "Remember now thy Creator *in the days of thy youth*." Jesus now stands at the door, and knocks. And now is our favourable time, the time of our visitation. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." It was Noah's time to enter the ark when the ark was finished, and ere the door was shut. It was the time when others ought to have entered.

It was Abraham's time to believe, and to sojourn in the land of promise when God called him. It was the time for Peter and James and John, when Jesus said to them,

"Follow me," to rise, leave all, and follow. Had they refused, the great mercy of being his disciples and sharing in his glory, would have been for others, not for them. It was the time for Lydia to have her heart opened when Paul proclaimed the messages of salvation in the little prayer-house on the banks of the Strymon. It was the time for blind Bartimeus to receive his sight and follow Jesus in the way, when Jesus was passing by. All the saints in heaven had their time, which they improved. All the lost in hell, (who heard the gospel,) had their time of gracious visitation, which they neglected. To the reader Jesus is offered *now*. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." It may be the last opportunity to believe and be saved. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Analysis. Verses 18-22.

Solomon here returns to his theme, the worthlessness of life without a hereafter.

VERSES 18–21. If there is no hereafter, the condition, life, death, and termination of man and beast are alike; and no one can know that man has any preëminence over a beast.

22. Hence present joy in one's work is best, as this is all the portion that he has, if there is no hereafter.

But Solomon intimates (v. 21) that the soul of man rises to God its Maker, and that the soul of the beast returns to the earth, or to non-existence.

EXPOSITION.

This passage has been claimed by infidels themselves as teaching that there is no future state of existence. Let it stand out isolated, and its teachings would be that of the darkest, gloomiest infidelity. It would dash to the ground

all our hopes of the future. But let it be (as it is) a link in the golden chain of reasoning which pervades this book, and it teaches the very contrary;—it tells of *immortality!*

After the sublime announcements in the previous part of the chapter, leading the mind step by step to the judgment; Solomon certainly does not in the remaining verses of this chapter unsay all that he had said, and tell us that man and beast are alike, and end their existence alike at death. But he returns again to the point to be illustrated, viz.: *If* there be no future life, all things "under the sun" are without value:—there is no value in toil, in wealth, in wisdom; and *man* and *beast share the same fate*.—Life is a farce, and unworthy of its Author. Man, with his noble powers and lofty aspirations, will, at the close of this brief life, be no better than a brute! And yet this is the infidel's proud desire. His boasted wisdom leads no further.

18. *I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.*

It is difficult to give a literal and yet satisfactory translation of this verse. Our English translation is obscure. Dr. Jacobus renders it thus: "I said in my heart, in regard to the sons of men, that God would manifest them, (make them manifest,) and that they might see that they themselves are beasts." "Literally, 'for manifesting them' (is) God." And for the seeing of themselves, they are beasts. The idea seems to be this:—Men are beasts passing away and perishing, so far as their own observation is concerned; while God will manifest them hereafter as immortal, to be judged. This verse connects the two great ideas preceding (v. 17) and following (vs. 19, 20.) God, and he alone, manifests man as worthy of being

judged. "We must all appear (be manifested) before the judgment-seat of Christ." But so far as human observation is concerned, man is but a beast. This is further dwelt upon in the next verses.

19, 20. *For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.*

The points of resemblance between man and beast are here presented. If this life is the only life, "one thing befalleth them." They die alike. They have the same spirit, (breath—*ruah*.) The Hebrew word here translated *breath*, is translated *wind*, *spirit*, *soul*, and *breath*, according to the scope of the passage in which it is found. Perhaps if it were here translated *spirit*, as in the 21st verse, it would give Solomon's true meaning. The idea is; men and beasts all go to one place:—the spirit ceases with the body to live:—"a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast." All is vanity:—life is of no use. Indeed, if there shall be no future, the lot of the beast is most to be desired, for it hath no solicitude for the future.

21. *Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?*

That is, who knoweth "from anything that is before him,"—from anything "under the sun."—that the soul or spirit of man goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth? But mark! the preacher here virtually declares this difference. The soul of man rises to heaven; or rises to be judged—"to God who gave it;" while the spirit of the brute goeth downward to the earth,—to nothing.

Different and conflicting views have been entertained as

to the immortality of the spirits of beasts. Among those who have argued that they shall live after this life, is Bishop Butler. Or rather, he argues that the dissolution of man's body is not the destruction of his soul, and admits that his argument equally applies to brutes—that their spirits may live after their bodies perish. But this text seems to declare that brutes perish at death. Their spirits go downward to the earth. In the xlix. Psalm, verse 12, beasts are said to *perish*. Going "upward" and going "downward" can hardly refer to the lofty aspirations of men, as compared with the grovelling propensities of beasts: for many men are as grovelling as the beasts.

22. *Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?*

If this life is all that there is, let a man *enjoy* it. "For that is his portion,"—all that he has.

"For who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?" That is, who shall bring him to see what is in a future state? This question corresponds with the question, "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upwards?" &c. Like the stall-fed ox, let him enjoy life, making no inquiries as to the future.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *We have here the great doctrine of* IMMORTALITY. "If," says Robertson, "there be a faith that cramps and enslaves the soul, it is the idea that this life is all. If there be one that expands and elevates, it is the thought of immortality; and this, observe, is something quite distinct from the selfish desire of happiness. It is not to *enjoy*, but to *be* that we long for. To enter into more and higher life; a craving which we can only part with when we sink beneath humanity, and forfeit it."

There may be men who desire not to be; whose consciences are so alive to their guilt that it would be a relief to perish.

> "When feared the future, 'tis no longer wished;
> And when unwished, we strive to disbelieve.
> Thus infidelity our *guilt* betrays.
> Nature's first wish is endless happiness;
> Annihilation is an after-thought,
> A monstrous wish, unborn till virtue dies.
> And O! what depth of horror lies enclosed!
> For non-existence no man ever wished,
> But, first, he wished the Deity destroyed.
> If so, what words are dark enough to draw
> The picture true? The darkest are too fair.
> Beneath what baleful planet, in what hour
> Of desperation, by what Fury's aid,
> In what infernal posture of the soul,
> All hell invited, and all hell in joy
> At such a birth, a birth so near of kin,
> Did thy foul fancy whelp so black a scheme
> Of hopes abortive, faculties half-blown,
> And deities begun, reduced to dust?"—YOUNG.

The doctrine of immortality lies at the foundation of all religion, and of all our prospects. Remove from us a belief in this doctrine, and religion is a mere *dream;*—life is no better than a *shadow;* and death is *full of horror!*

It is true that man has a mortal part. The *body* is made of earth, it is a part of the material universe. It is subject to the laws of matter. The composition of the human body shows that it is of the earth, as the Bible declares;—that it was made of the ground. It is composed of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, lime, sulphur, iron, phosphorus, and some other earthly ingredients. There is no foreign substance, no part but what belongs to earth. Modern chemistry comes to the support of revelation, and shows that man's body was formed of the dust (*apher.*) Hence it is as subject to gravitation as the sand; to mechanical force as the watch; to chemical action as the

bread of which it partakes. Man's body, like a tree, is organized, and like a tree grows by vitalizing the food presented and appropriated.

But the soul is wholly different from the body. "God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul."

Certainly the soul of man has never been developed from matter. Infidels may talk of "self-evolution" and "natural law," by which to bring forth all kinds of life and the soul of man out of dead matter, and call it philosophy. They may speculate on the subject, and try to show how "electricity" may evolve from "albumen" a point of life, from which all living things have sprung. Rejecting revelation, they may wander into ten thousand mazes and speculations, the summing up of which is, that the soul, beginning in matter, will end in matter, and perish eternally. We may say with Rev. H. H. Hopkins: "After wandering over the wild wastes and utter desolations of atheism, what a refreshing escape to enter once more into the rich floral and productive regions of Divine revelation! The eye brightens and dilates amidst the vast variety and grandeur of the scene. The serene heavens shine with the splendour and majesty of God. 'In thy light shall we see light.' God is the central point of all true science and philosophy, as well as of a written revelation." His word declares a glorious immortality.

If man is not immortal, there is nothing valuable in religion or even in science. Life is an enigma, the world a scene of confusion, virtue a phantom, and God's providence an inextricable maze!

But if man is immortal, all that he does is of infinite moment!

Immortality has been argued from the soul's *immateriality*. But the argument is less satisfactory than some

others. It has been argued from the *universal belief* of man. But even a Socrates could only hope "that there is something remaining for those who are dead." It has been argued from the *earnest desire* for a future state. "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing" the things of time. Immortality has been argued from the *thirst* of the human mind *for knowledge*;—from the *perpetual progress* of the mind toward perfection;—from the *unlimited range* opened up for it through space and duration;—from man's *moral powers*;—from the *forebodings* of an evil conscience;—from the *disorders* in the *moral world*;—and from the *unequal distribution of rewards* and *punishments* in this world. Indeed these last two arguments are brought forward in this Book of Ecclesiastes. It is a *revealed* treatise on *natural* theology; especially with reference to *another life*. And the writer brings out of his argument an immortal future. "God shall bring every work into judgment." The word of God gives the only satisfactory account of the future. It has "brought life and immortality to light." Abraham looked for a city with foundations. Moses had respect to the recompense of a reward. Others confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, seeking a better country, even an heavenly. David expected to dwell in the house of God for ever. Job knew that his Redeemer lived, and that he would stand upon the earth at the last day. In the New Testament immortality is most clearly revealed. "I know," says Paul, "that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Jesus declared to his disciples that he would go and prepare a place for them, and come again and receive them to himself:—that he that believed on him should live for ever:—that the righteous should inherit life eternal,

while the wicked should go away into everlasting punishment.

II. *The doctrine of our immortality should urge us to seek a* BLISSFUL *immortality.*

If we are not to become extinct at death, our immortality will be one of bliss or woe:—bliss boundless, or woe unmitigated. Into the future we must carry our characters, but not our wealth or honour.

If our treasures are only earthly, there will be an eternity of utter poverty. If our treasures are laid up in heaven, we shall be rich and happy for ever. Eternal life and death are suspended on the decisions and doings of the present life. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned." "Except ye repent, ye shall all——perish." The greatest of all folly is, to throw away the joys of heaven for the pleasures, or wealth, or honours of this short life! Better be a brute, and perish with the end of this life, than be an immortal man, and perish eternally! Indeed the brute has the advantage, even in *this* life, over the wicked. The brute creation have no thought, no fear of evil. Their life is not embittered with the expectation that they must die;—they have no knowledge beyond the present and the past;—but they live in contented ignorance and apathy, and at death sink into the deep, never-ending night of annihilation. But it is not so with man. Man perishes from the cradle to the grave; and "suffers a thousand deaths in fearing one."* This is emphatically true of impenitent men, men unreconciled to God. Christians look with hope and joy to a glorious future.

* Spring.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTENTS.

This chapter is an example of unity in variety. It contains several distinct subjects which have no natural connection; but they are all brought forward to illustrate the great theme that there is no profit in life without a future life. Various conditions of life are adduced to show that "there is no profit under the sun."

Oppression, right or successful business, idleness, anxious labour, the life of a miser,—of a ruler,—of a subject; all have their disadvantages;—there is no permanent profit in them, but much misery connected with some of them. The advantages of society contrast pleasingly with the miseries of the lonely miser, as seen in verses 9–12.

Analysis. Ver. 1-16.

VERSES 1–3. Not only is there no profit, (if this is the only world,) but there is much grief in life. Galling oppression makes life a burden.

4. And even righteous deeds are so far from being an advantage that they bring envy, (often resulting in persecution.)

5. 6. Idleness, on the one hand; and anxious labour on the other, yield only sorrow.

7, 8. This is illustrated by the sorrows of the miser.

9–12. The advantages of society—of marriage, are here given as a contrast to the miseries of the *lonely* miser.

13–16. Rulers, on the one hand, have no real advantage, as their authority is uncertain: And the subjects, on the other, have no unalloyed peace, being discontented and fond of change.

EXPOSITION.

1. *So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.*

This is a very affecting statement of the fruits of oppression. Also, how often do tears flow in solitude, on account of the wrongs inflicted by those in power, while

there is no one to comfort the mourner! The word "oppressions" includes injuries done to the person, property, or good name of any one. Masters, rulers, fathers, husbands, have it in their power to oppress. Multitudes in the various relations of life, regardless of the wishes and tears of their fellows, make hard their lot, and add to the burdens which press them down.

2. *Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.*

Solomon commended the condition of the dead, for they were beyond the reach of oppression. Some think that Solomon here expresses a peevish discontent with life, as Job did when he cursed the day of his birth; or as Elijah did, when he said, "O Lord, take away my life." Jonah uttered a similar complaint when he said, (Jonah iv. 3,) "O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." But it depends upon our preparation for death whether it is better to die than to live. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." Paul desired to depart and be with Christ, rather than to live. But Solomon praised the dead rather than the living, on the supposition of there being no future state. This is evident from the next verse.

3. *Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.*

Non-existence is better than existence, if there is no future. To the wicked, existence is a curse—they make it so. It had been better for Judas if he had not been born. It is better not to be brought into being, than to live a little while in suffering and anxiety, and then cease to live for ever. This verse cannot be explained on any other principle than that Solomon was arguing the worthlessness

and misery of this life on the supposition that there is no other. If there is no future life, it is better not to live at all.

4. ¶ *Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.*

Some translate it "every successful undertaking," instead of, "every right work." The original is susceptible of both translations. But our translation seems preferable. For *doing right* multitudes have been envied and even persecuted. Cain envied Abel for his *goodness*, resulting in God's favour. Esau envied Jacob because he was better than himself. Saul envied David for the same reason. And it was for no other reason that our blessed Redeemer was persecuted unto the death—he exhibited an example that reproved the wicked continually. It is better then, if there is no future, not to abound too much in good deeds—*right works*, lest we be "persecuted for righteousness' sake." To be strictly righteous excites the enmity of evil men. This sentiment corresponds with that found in chapter vii. verse 16, "Be not righteous overmuch, for why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Why become a martyr, by exciting the enmity of others for your goodness?

5. *The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.*

Here is a perfect contrast to the man who abounds in good works. It is the man that does nothing. He folds his hands in idleness, thinking to enjoy himself in his ease. Nor is his life of any value. Figuratively he "eats his own flesh." He pines away in poverty. Here is a contrast between industry and idleness; and in choosing either, a man chooses evil. If he chooses industry—a

"right work," he subjects himself to envy. If he chooses idleness, he eats his own flesh. In every point of view then, life is valueless without another.

6. *Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.*

Some consider this the language of the idle man excusing his idleness. But it seems to be an intimation that there is a "golden mean," such as Agur asked when he said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Henry says, "Moderate pains and moderate gains, will do best."

7. ¶ *Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.*

8. *There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.*

Here the grasping miser is described. Though he has no family, "not a second"—not an heir—he bereaves his soul of good, and labours unceasingly, not asking himself why he does so.

9. ¶ *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.*

Society is here recommended as better than a solitary life; and no doubt marriage is here recommended in preference to celibacy.

10. *For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.*

11. *Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?*

12. *And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

In marriage and society there is (ver. 10) mutual assistance; (11,) mutual comfort; (12,) mutual defence. These verses need but little comment. But they are in direct opposition to a monastic life and vows of celibacy. It is said that Jerome wrote his commentary on this book to bring a young Roman lady, Blesilla, to adopt a monastic life. In his zeal for nunneries he certainly mistook the teachings of Solomon.

13. ¶ *Better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.*

14. *For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor.*

Regal power does not profit. The old, foolish, headstrong king, though born to an hereditary throne, becomes poor by his folly, (is dethroned.) But the youth may come (like Joseph) from the prison itself, into power. Such are the constant ups and downs in government. *What profit?*

15. *I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.*

The living subjects, or those living *now*, looking to their own supposed advantage, prefer the heir apparent; the successor, the "second child." In other words, the people are fond of change. Discontented with the present state of things, they desire to have it altered. They hope for better times when the present ruler shall give place to his successor. Pompey said to Scylla, "More men adore the rising than the setting sun."

16. *There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

But the people soon tire of the successor also. "They

that come after shall not rejoice in him," in the successor, just as the people that went before did not rejoice in his father or predecessor. So fickle are men. The people who expected Rehoboam to ease the burdens imposed by Solomon, were an illustration. The people who left David to follow Absalom, were another. Rulers trembling for their throne, and people seeking change and revolution, present additional evidence that there is no profit *under the sun.*

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *We are led to reflect on the evils of oppression.*

Alas, what woes and sorrows fill the world! Otherwise fair and beautiful, this world presents a most melancholy picture through "the wrongs and outrages" with which it is filled. Sin makes the creation groan and travail in pain.

> If in the music of the other spheres
> Harmonious notes in joyous measure flow;
> From earth, discordant, jars upon the ears
> One minor note, the plaintive note of "woe."

The saddest sights on earth are the tears of the oppressed where there is "no comforter." Like ocean sharks or evening wolves, some of our race delight to prey upon their fellows. Elevated by wealth, by office, or by brute force, they crush the hearts of their dependants. The debtor groans under the relentless exactions of a hardened creditor, who strips him of his home, and sends him forth to contend with penury and want. The labourer is driven by his hard master, till limbs and head and heart are weary, and then not a word of cheer greets him at the nightfall. The poor orphan, whose lot it is to fall into the hands of a tyrant-guardian, dare not whisper his tale of sorrow into the ears of a sympathizing friend.—He has "no comforter."

And even the strong arm of the father, and the flashing eye of the mother, are sometimes employed to break the spirit of a child that would be dutiful and happy, if kindness and love were in the parents' hearts rather than pride and passion.

The poor slave, manacled, and driven with the lash, and sold like a beast of burden, and separated from wife and children; feels that the grave will be a desirable resting-place; and he longs to die. Infants torn from their mothers and cast into the Nile;—Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted;—Christians crushed by the brazen rule of pagan Rome, and the saints worn out by the iron rule of papal Rome; are specimens of the sad effects of human tyranny.

The Inquisition, Bartholomew's bloody slaughter, tortures by piercing the body with sharp instruments, tearing out the nails of toes and fingers, tearing the flesh with red-hot pincers, burnings on the stake, rackings on the wheel; —these, *these*, are thy tender mercies, O cruel Rome!

"Beware of men," said our blessed Lord, as though men were man's most dangerous foe. Man has always been man's most cruel oppressor. "And there was no comforter." Oh could the sufferer be greeted with a smile of love, by one look of kindness, by one soft whispered word of cheer, how would the throbbing heart rejoice!

But there *is* a comforter. Jesus said to his sorrowful disciples, "I will send you another Comforter, and he shall abide with you for ever." There is no bondage so cruel, no chain so heavy, no dungeon so dark, but this Comforter—the Spirit of God—can find out the sad heart and inspire it with joy. He can lighten up with blessed radiance the dark room of suffering, and awaken songs in the prison-house. To this gracious Comforter let the weary, the sad, the oppressed, repair. And while pilgrims

on earth they will bear the rod with patience, nay, with joy; and soon the wicked will cease from troubling, and the weary will be at rest. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." If not sooner, in the land of rest above their joy will be full.

But woe to the oppressors! They shall have "blood to drink" that have shed innocent blood. "The most terrible of foes is a victim." To Pharaoh the blood of the Hebrew infants was, no doubt, more terrible than armed soldiers warring against him. The slaughtered babes of Bethlehem crushed Herod's heart more than the wrath of Cæsar could have done. Oppressor! repent, show mercy; or your unavailing cries, rending the air with wails of agony, will be uttered when mercy is clean gone for ever! "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy."

II. *Envy is one of the basest and most wretched of passions.* "A man is envied of his neighbour" for "every good work." Envy is a canker eating into the vitals. And it often prompts to deeds of violence. "Who can stand before envy?" The wealth, honour, success, and especially the virtue of others, awaken envy and hate in the heart of the wicked man. Abel stood forth as a believer when the earth was young, and deeds of violence were as yet unknown. Looking forward to the great atonement, he offered a *bloody* sacrifice as its type. Cain, the unbeliever, brought a goodly offering, but it had no reference to the coming Redeemer. As the wreaths of smoke from Abel's accepted sacrifice arose to heaven, envy fired the heart of Cain; and he stained the ground with Abel's blood, "because his own works were evil and his brother's righteous." He hated the very goodness of that brother with whom he had spent the days of his child-

hood. So Esau sought to slay his brother. He hated his twin brother, not only for his success but for his piety. His own birth-right which included religious advantages, he despised, and bartered it away for a mess of pottage. And yet he had the presumption to complain of his brother, as though he had fraudulently taken it from him. The secret was,—he was unhappy because Jacob was good.

David was the object of Saul's revenge, more because he hated his piety than because the people sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."

And why, dear Jesus, wast thou persecuted and hated, and hunted down? "Why did the heathen rage?" Why did rulers join in plotting thy destruction? Why did they condemn thee, and nail thee to the cross, and put thee to grief, and take thy life? Thy hands were pure. In thy tongue was the law of kindness. Thy heart was a gushing fountain of love. Why then that bitter hate that hunted thee down? Ah, it was because "for a good work a man is envied of his neighbour." It was because sin hates goodness; because wickedness longs to crush out and eradicate every vestige of piety from the earth. Alas for the condition of the unsanctified heart!

III. *We see the fruits of avarice.* Its fruits are the apples of Sodom. How utterly without friends and sympathy is the miser. "There is one alone;"—no friend;—"yet there is no end of all his labour. The eye is not satisfied with riches." He who has neither child nor brother is often the man to labour and save and heap up, and deny himself the comforts of life. The miser is most often found among those who have none to provide for. He who is called daily to disburse money to the needy or to support his own family, seldom becomes so

avaricious. His heart is opened, and his hands are generous. How utterly wretched is the man who lives wholly for himself, and whose veins flow with molten gold!

IV. *Social life, on the other hand, is full of comfort.* "Two are better than one." They have a reward of their labour. Man was formed for society. That he might have time to commune with God the Sabbath was instituted. That he might commune with a kindred heart, marriage was instituted. These first two ordinances of God's appointment, show that God was acquainted with man's social necessities and would provide for them. Hence, (whatever may be the pretext,) monasteries are ruinous to all the finer feelings of the heart. "To maintain, unbent and unsullied, the rectitude of sound reason, and the propriety of sound feelings, in solitude," says the author of 'The Natural History of Enthusiasm,' "surpasses the power of human nature. Good sense is the fruit of intercourse." "Monasteries contributed, more than anything else, to the darkness of the middle ages. They have always been sources of corruption." One of the offshoots of monasticism is religious celibacy. But to make religion consist in abstaining from a relation that God has blest,—the marriage relation,—is an error that leads to the gravest consequences. The monk is twin brother to the miser. They are not "companions in distress," for they have no companions. But they are solitary and alike in their misery. All the difference is, the monk dares call his monstrous selfishness by the name of sanctity. When he ought to be blessing the world, he draws the cloak of pride and selfishness around him, under pretext of greater holiness! Men were made to enjoy society and to bear each other's burdens; and who can

estimate the value of communion with kindred hearts? Nothing is sweeter except communion with heaven.

V. *It is not in distinction and authority to give content.* We are led to the throne of the old king to ascertain whether power is profitable. It may profit others, and is an inestimable advantage to the world, to have rulers, rulers especially who fear God. But no man need desire the ruler's place. Whether his title is that of king, emperor, or president, it is never a bed of roses on which he rests.

> "——Nor diamond's glow,
> Nor pearly radiance, free from care.
> Peace is not in the gems we wear:—
> And weary are the hands that bear
> The sceptre of a king."

And yet we cannot duly prize the blessing of a good ruler in a good government. In the best governments, however, and under the best rulers, there have always been restless, discontented spirits, that would overturn the laws that protect them, and the constitution under which they are nourished. The best of rulers often becomes a target for public rancour. The incoming man is the *great* man for the people. But ere his administration closes, "they that come after shall not rejoice in *him*."

There is one Ruler, the Prince of glory, whose reign will bless his subjects, and whose fame shall endure for ever. Jesus shall rule the world in righteousness. May he reign in the writer's and the reader's heart for ever!

> "Bring forth the royal diadem,
> And crown him Lord of all."

CHAPTER V.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains, 1. *Directions concerning the worship of God*, 1–7. 2. *The failure of power to secure advantage*, 8–11. 3. *The failur. of riches to secure advantage*, 12–17. 4. *The proper use of God's gifts*, 18–20.

Analysis. Verses 1–7.

VERSES 1–3. Be truly devout; for religion itself is of no advantage unless the worshipper is devout and reverential. Reverence is enjoined, in opposition to rash, hasty, and verbose utterances.

4–6. Vows should be made with caution, and performed promptly, lest God be angry.

7. A dreamy, wordy religion is vain. But God is to be feared.

EXPOSITION.

The bearing of this passage upon the general subject, may not, at first sight, be apparent. But Solomon seems to have brought forward religion and religious worship, as it regards *this* life; that he might show that they were valueless when engaged in contrary to their true design. Religion has reference to a future state. If there is no future state, it is a mere ceremony. To engage in it as a mere ceremony it has no value,—it is a profitless labour.

Solomon had shown that human wisdom, mirth, improvements, wealth, fame, authority, and even works that were right, were unsatisfactory, if there were no future state:—that every thing that man *seeks*, *does*, *longs for*, fails to bless him. And now he reminds his audience, that even the worship of God must be right, or it would produce no good result. The mere outward form, without that life which the belief in a future state imparts, is of

no worth. Worship must be reverential, deliberate, attentive.

1. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.*

The house of God is wherever he is worshipped. At the time of the utterance of this sermon, the temple was the place for public worship. But even then men might worship acceptably elsewhere: and they might worship unacceptably at the temple. Bethel (the house of God) had its name changed to Bethaven, (the house of idols, Hos. x. 5,) on account of the calves which were set up there and worshipped. We should fear, lest we make our Bethels Bethavens. "Keep thy foot." "Stand still, and be attentive."*

Different forms have been used to manifest reverence. As we take off the hat in entering a place of worship, so the ancients took off their shoes. Ex. iii. 5. We are, however, to reverence God, and not the place.

"Sacrifice of fools." Worship is called a sacrifice because it is an offering. Hence the prophet Hosea speaks of "the calves of the lips." Hos. xiv. 2.

"They consider not that they do evil." By irreverence and evil motives, even worshippers do evil. Worship that is mere formality is offensive to God. They that worship God "must worship him in spirit and in truth."

2. *Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.*

This may refer either to offering prayer or imparting instruction. "The admonition 'let thy words be few,'"

* Hewit.

says Hengstenberg, "is not meant to set limits to the glow and fire of devotion. It is directed not against the inwardly devout, but against the *superficially religious*, who fancy that in the multitude of their words they have an equivalent for the devotion they lack." Our Saviour rebukes the Pharisees who for *pretense* made long prayers. Public prayer becomes a weariness to many when too much protracted; and sermons when brief are generally more for edification than when too prolix. No general rule, however, will suit all circumstances. Secret prayer, when offered with Jacob's importunity, may continue all night, and even when the morning dawns the worshipper may say to the Angel of the Covenant, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

"God is in heaven." He dwells in light and glory. Before his awful presence, lightness and merriment are altogether unbecoming—profane.

3. *For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

Dreams often follow the business of the preceding day, and should not be regarded as a revelation. Mere dreams were never intended to be guides to duty. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." Jer. xxiii. 28.

"And a fool's voice," &c. As dreams are the result of a previous day's employment, so words are the result of the employment of the heart. The fool's words are dreamy.

4. *When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.*

Vows are of the nature of a promissory oath. But

there is a distinction between an oath and a vow. In an oath, man is the party, and God is invoked as a witness. In a vow, God is both a party and a witness. A vow must be to God *only*. It should be voluntary, and it should be made in reliance on the grace of God. No man may vow to *do* an unlawful act, or to do what may *lead* to an unlawful act. Jephthah vowed to sacrifice whatsoever should come forth of the doors of his house to meet him, if God should deliver the children of Ammon into his hands, when he should return home in peace. The event proved that the vow was rash, and therefore wrong. In the exultation of her heart at her father's success, not knowing his rash vow, his daughter, an only child, "came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances." The language of Scripture would lead us to believe that he sacrificed his daughter under the mistaken idea that he was bound to perform a sinful vow. "Defer not to pay." This injunction pre-supposes that the vow has been lawful.

In Deut. xxiii. 21, 22, we learn that it is no sin not to vow; but if we vow lawfully, it is a sin not to pay the vow.

5. *Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

This is common sense, as well as religion. It would not have been sinful in Ananias and Sapphira, to have retained for their own use a portion of the money which they received on the sale of their land, had they not professed to give it *all* to the Lord. Their guilt was in lying to the Holy Ghost, in saying they sold their land for a sum smaller than they actually received, and professing to give the whole avails of the sale to the Lord.

6. *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say*

thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Let not thy mouth (in vowing) cause thy flesh—thy corrupt nature—to sin (in not performing.) Some suppose that the guardian angel is here meant. Some refer the word "angel" to the Angel of the Covenant—Christ. (See Ex. xxiii. 20–22.) But it more likely means *God's minister*. The priest was called "the messenger of the Lord of Hosts." Mal. ii. 7. Angel is but another name for messenger. John wrote to the angels of the seven churches of Asia, *i. e.* to the pastors of those churches.

"*It was an error.*" It was a mistake. Hamilton says, (*in loco,*) "Some in a fit of fervour utter vows which they forget to pay; and when reminded of their promise by the angel of the church, (the priest or his messenger,) they protest that there must be some mistake; they repudiate the vow, and say, 'it was an error.'" "No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise or ability from God. In which respects, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself."*

7. *For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities; but fear thou God.*

The remedy is, a heart-felt and abiding reverence,—"fear thou God." The fear of the Lord is piety—is true religion—is the beginning of wisdom. All the profit that there is in this life, is to prepare for another—a higher

* Confession of Faith, ch. xxii. § 7.

life. Hence "the conclusion of the whole matter," as summed up in chapter xii. 13, is this, "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man." Our translators supply the word *duty*. It would be in accordance with the inquiry of the book of Ecclesiastes to supply *profit*. "This is the whole *profit* of man."

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Man is a religious being, and must therefore be a worshipper.* Public worship as well as private is admirably adapted to the mysterious cravings of the human heart. If religion is essential to man, (and it is,) the public worship of God is essential to religion. The Scriptures are doubly dear when we can share their teachings with our fellow-worshippers. The throne of grace seems more accessible when there are a whole band of petitioners.

In Solomon's better days the temple had been completed. There it stood on Mount Moriah, with its towering porch and its brazen pillars; its costly stones, and its plates of gold. Thither the tribes of Israel went up to worship. Three times a year the city of Jerusalem was crowded with worshippers. And every Sabbath day some repaired to this sacred place of prayer. Solomon could see, perhaps, from his own magnificent home, the lofty porch, and could hear, perhaps, the loud-sounding cymbals. It may have been in the court of this temple, or in "Solomon's porch," that he uttered the discourse, now constituting this Book of Ecclesiastes.

To the outer court of the temple, through one of its western gates, the causeway led from the royal palace And why might not Solomon lead his queenly and kingly visitors along this way to the court of the temple, and utter there the words of wisdom which caused them to exclaim, "the one-half was not told me?"

And those same visitors, from Sheba, and Tyre, and Persia, may have entered with him the courts of the temple, to hear from God's ministers the word of God!

We, however, have a more blessed privilege. Splendid as was the temple,—imposing as was the Jewish ritual our simple worship is far more refreshing, more enlighten ing.

In the Jewish worship there was much to please the eye, the ear, the taste; but the power of truth grew feeble under the glitter of externals.

But from Jacob's humble altar, on which he poured his libation of oil; to the magnificent temple, the worshippers could say, "This is the house of God." In our humble places of worship, we too have a house of God, which proves to be "the gate of heaven." May we be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house.

Coming to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we make every place a house of prayer. "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

II. *Worship on earth is preparatory to the higher and holier worship of heaven.*

Happy are those who so worship here as to be prepared to worship there. Here we worship in temples made with hands, and sometimes in circumstances of discomfort. There the worshippers meet in a temple "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Here we meet in worship with good but very imperfect men. There we shall meet with those made perfect, walking in robes washed and

made white in the blood of the Lamb. If on a high mountain rearing its head a little way towards heaven, the disciples exclaimed, "It is good for us to be here," because Moses and Elijah and Jesus were there talking about the coming decease of Christ; how overwhelmed with glory will be those favoured ones who shall stand upon the everlasting hills in the company of all the redeemed, and Jesus in their midst, while the theme will still be the redemption; but then understood and appreciated as it could not be by Peter, James, and John, on the mount of transfiguration. Here we attempt to praise; but

> "Hosannas languish on our tongues,
> And our devotion dies."

But there, the high anthems of the redeemed, without a discordant note, fill all the concave with melody, as the voice of many waters. In heaven there will be no "sacrifice of fools," no rash utterances, no dreams. The worshippers shall no longer "see through a glass, darkly," but all within them and around them will be light, and joy, and glory. May the writer and reader be sharers in the bliss.

Analysis. Verses 8-20.

VERSE 8. The oppressor gains nothing, for he will have to account to a higher power.

9–12. The great and powerful are only on a level with others. (9.) They have the same food. (10.) Their abundance does not satisfy. (11.) Goods are not enjoyed by their owners more than by others. (12.) The wealthy are often restless, while the tired labourer sleeps soundly. The ninth verse is closely connected in sense with the eighth. We should not oppress, for the profit of the earth is for *all*:—there should be no monopoly of good things.

13–17. Riches laid up in store fail to secure the object intended, for (13) if kept for the owner's *own* advantage, they often prove an injury. (14.) If kept for an heir, he often fails to get them. (15.) He cannot take them with him to the grave. (16.) It is labour *for the wind* merely. (17.) And sorrow attends his last sickness.

18–20. God's gifts should, however, not be despised, but enjoyed.

EXPOSITION.

Hitherto the writer had presented *new* themes one after another, without often re-introducing the same thought. Now, he begins to present some of the same ideas varied and amplified. The question still before the mind of "the Preacher" is, "What profit hath a man of all his labour, which he taketh under the sun?"

8. ¶ *If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.*

Solomon had extensive knowledge of violence and wrong in the world.

"*In a province.*" Provinces do not necessarily mean districts in the land of Judea, or even in the countries governed by Solomon. The Hebrew word is מדינה. Lexicographers reckon this as one of the later Hebrew words. And some have inferred from this and a few others, that the Book of Ecclesiastes was not written by Solomon. But it is a Chaldee word, and though not

found in the Hebrew Scriptures till after the time of Solomon, (except in Ecclesiastes,) he may himself have introduced it into the Hebrew language, as he was acquainted with different languages, and had intercourse with the east as well as other parts of the world. Addressing, as he often did, men of different nations, he would be likely to use words familiar to those nations. See 1 Kings x. 24. In Chaldea or Assyria the word might have been in use at the time. Provinces were districts of country under prefects, viceroys, or satraps. These officers were often oppressive, and perverted judgment and justice.

"*For he that is higher than the highest regardeth*," &c. Higher rulers sit in judgment on lower. "*There are higher than they*," means that God is higher than all, and he will judge all. The plural is used as intensive, to designate the Most High God. Do not consider it inexplicable that there is oppression, (marvel not at it,) for there is One who will bring it all right at last. Here a future reward is evidently hinted at. "An appeal lies to a higher court; but if the matter still goes on adversely there, then remember for your comfort that there is *One superior to all*, who will bring all into judgment."*

9. ¶ *Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field.*

If the English translation is correct, it means that subjects have the same advantages that kings have. The ground must produce for all alike. Kings do not feed upon ambrosia, but upon bread that comes from the fields,—upon the same kind of bread that the tiller of the soil eats. There is therefore no superior advantage to persons in authority. Bridges connects the sense of this

* Stuart.

verse with the preceding, thus: "Perhaps the supremacy of God giving to *all* an equal interest in the *earth*, was intended as a memento, that common interest and mutual dependence should check unjust *oppression*."

10. *He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.*

Multitudes place their trust for profit in wealth, in silver, in gain. But it will not satisfy. It is vanity. *What profit?* The truth of this verse is so patent, that the reflecting of all ages have discovered it. Horace says, "Semper avarus eget:"—The avaricious man is always in want.

11. *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?*

Wealthy men generally find it necessary to employ persons to look after their affairs, and often have a large retinue. Both Job and Solomon had "a very great household," arising partly from their wealth, as they needed servants to attend to it. Planters had sometimes thousands of slaves. The master reaps no more—or little more advantage than the servant. He can only behold his possessions with his eyes, while attendants, waiters, servants, with but little care and trouble, enjoy them.

12. *The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.*

Toil brings sleep. God, in kindness to the sons of toil, so orders it that they generally sleep soundly, and are thereby refreshed. But the man of wealth, though lying on a softer couch, is often prevented from enjoying this luxury. Two causes may be assigned for the sleep-

lessness of the rich. First, wealth often leads its possessor to dissipation, and consequent pain of body. Who can sleep with the gout at his feet, or delirium tremens at his brain? Second, fear of robbery or of sudden loss fills the mind with anxiety, so that sleep departs from his eyes. "Elwes the millionaire is said to have often started from his sleep, and to have been found in the dead of night wandering through his house, mourning over the loss of five pounds."

13. *There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.*

14. *But those riches perish by evil travail; and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.*

15. *As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.*

16. *And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?*

These verses show that riches laid up in store fail to secure the object intended, and therefore are unprofitable; or rather a great disadvantage. They tempt to vain-glory and to forgetfulness of God. The soul is made lean while the body is pampered. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" Mat. xix. 23. *By evil travail*—by speculations, or accidents, riches make to themselves wings. And the man has nothing in his hand by which to bless his heir. He goes out of the world as he came in—*naked*. His first robes are swaddling-bands—his last robe is a winding-sheet. If there is no future, how worthless are the fleeting possessions of earth! The man who labours for this world only, labours *for the wind*—for a puff of air—for very vanity. What profit—?

17. *All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.*

The last sickness of the wretched worldling is often attended with the greatest grief and the manifest wrath of God. "Wrath from above!—terror from within!—a *dark* eternity before him of unspeakable torment!—an everlasting night!"* Let me not die the death of the wicked.

The *darkness* here spoken of is that mental gloom and sadness which often comes upon those who make money their god. They "pierce themselves through with many sorrows." The misery of an old age without religion is forcibly presented in the last chapter, xii. 2. It is compared to the darkening of the sun—the light—the moon—the stars, and the clouds returning after the rain. Hengstenberg translates the verse thus: "All his days also he eateth in darkness and hath much discontent, and then his sickness and wrath." *Wrath* may refer to God's wrath, which rests upon him in this life, and follows him to the next. But it is generally understood of *his own* anger and vexation.

18. ¶ *Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him; for it is his portion.*

19. *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.*

20. *For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.*

So far from tending to gloom and sorrow, as some suppose, religion sweetens even temporal things and gives them power to yield enjoyment. It is good and comely for a man to enjoy the good of his labour. "Religion

* Bridges.

never was designed to make our pleasures less." It is God's gift to enable a man to be cheerful and happy in the enjoyment of good things. The 20th verse seems to be a contrast with the 17th. There the wicked man has sorrow and wrath in his last sickness. Here the righteous man "shall not much remember" the sorrows of the past, for God is with him giving joy. It is evident that Solomon does not speak against wealth as such, or against men because they are wealthy. He recognizes it as coming from God, and also the enjoying of it as coming from God. God gives "power" to enjoy, when by his Spirit he frees the heart from the bonds of avarice. When the Christian can look at his earthly inheritance as the gift of his heavenly Father, reconciled to him through the righteousness of his Redeemer, and can with a heart full of the graces of his Comforter enjoy it, gratitude and praise ascend as incense before God. He thanks God for this earthly portion, though it is not the *peculiar* portion of his soul. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." Lam. iii. 24.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *God has given to man a* RICH POSSESSION *in this* FAIR WORLD *which he inhabits.* "The profit of the earth is for all." God claims for himself the heavens, while he has given the earth to men. "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men." Ps. cxv. 16. What a magnificent gift! How well adapted is it to his wants! For the use of man volcanic fires have fused and crystallized the granite, and piled it up into lofty table-land. For him the water has washed it down into fruitful valleys, where nature rejoices in its luxuriant growth. For him there are opened up hundreds of thousands of gushing crystal

springs, where he may slake his thirst. Rich metallic veins interlace these hills and valleys. Beneath the surface are vast storehouses of vegetables now transmuted into fuel, and into oil for heating and lighting up his abode. The interior of the earth is made a storehouse for all things necessary for his comfort and wealth, upon which he learns to draw from age to age, as God gives him wisdom to understand their value. There they have lain for centuries awaiting the time when human progress shall need them, and call them up from their dark caverns. Specimens of the handiwork of God appear in every recess. "As for the earth, out of it cometh bread; and under it is turned up as it were fire. The stones of it are the place of sapphires; and it hath dust of gold." Job xxviii. 5, 6. The atmosphere, besides affording the breath of life, is a great laboratory where chemical changes are going on continually. The lightnings play at pleasure, and "the wind bloweth where it listeth." Man may lay hold of all these agents, and employ them for his work. He may make his pathway across the ocean. He may employ the winds in driving his machinery, or in wafting his vessel to foreign ports. He may bind the steam to his car, and send the forked lightning as his ambassador to whisper his commands into the ear of distant cities or armies. God has given the earth with its appendages to men, and they should lay hold of its advantages to advance their own true interests, and the glory of God. Yes, God should be glorified by our use of the world, for though he has given it to us, we are but renters and stewards. We are his tenants at will. And when we have used the earth to the best advantage,—when we have partaken of its fruits, and dug up its treasures, we commit our bodies to its bosom, as our loving mother, there to sleep till the graves give up their dead.

II. *Let us appreciate, and be thankful for the blessing of* SLEEP.

"The sleep of the labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." What a delightful provision for restoring our wasted energies! "Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep." "There is no fact more clearly established in the physiology of man than this, that the brain expends its energies and itself during the hours of wakefulness, and that these are recuperated during sleep. If the recuperation does not equal the expenditure, the brain withers—this is insanity." Persons condemned to death by being prevented from sleeping, as has been the barbarous punishment inflicted by some nations, always die maniacs. All should endeavour to secure a sufficient amount of sleep. It was one of Jacob's grievances when in the service of his father-in-law, that he lost his sleep. "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." One of God's favours to his people is, "He giveth his beloved sleep." Ps. cxxvii. 2. To the wise and obedient God says, "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." Prov. iii. 24. With a sense of God's protecting care, we may say with the Psalmist, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." Ps. iv. 8. "But the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." The hand of the robber may be on his treasures;—the cares of the past day may follow him through the night;—or late hours of intemperate indulgence may goad his conscience.

No downy pillow will make amends for the thorn rankling in the heart. Thus "fevered with late hours and false excitement, scared by visions, or with palpitating heart

listening to every sound—the fancied footstep of the robber," some lie, and watch, and *toss* till dawn of day. Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Henry IV. these expressive words:—

> "How many thousands of my poorest subjects
> Are at this hour asleep! Sleep, gentle sleep!
> Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
> That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,
> And steep my senses in forgetfulness!
> Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
> Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
> And hushed with buzzing night-flies to thy slumber,
> Than in the perfumed chambers of the great,
> Under the canopies of costly state,
> And lulled with sounds of sweetest melody?
> . . . . Then, happy low, lie down!
> Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!"

Let us have minds at peace with God and man,—let us use frugally God's gifts, and be employed in useful avocations; and we may hope to enjoy refreshing slumber.

But there is a last sleep, sweet to the righteous. They "sleep in Jesus." After a long sleep the body will arise fresh, vigorous, beautiful; prepared to walk the streets of the new Jerusalem, and to perform the work of a glorious and never-ending day. The soul will, at the commencement of this sleep, be wafted away, not in the wild fancies of a dream, but in blessed reality, to a world of beauties and wonders, beyond what the imagination of the natural sleeper ever painted. There it will revel in pure pleasure, and bask for ever in the sunshine of heaven. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

III. *Let us turn and view the contrast between the death of the righteous and that of the wicked.* That man is miserable in his final sickness, who has only an

earthly portion. "He hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness." Verse 17. Luxurious living and remorse for evil deeds, bring "gloom of mind, irritability, prolonged infirmity, with impatient and angry fretting under it." It is true, that some wicked men "have no bands in their death." They die carelessly. But many sad instances are frequently brought to the view of the pastor and other observers, of ungodly men dying in the greatest agony of mind. And if agony does not commence sooner, there will be boundless woe when the spirit takes its departure to the "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish" of "outer darkness."

Not so the death of the righteous. "He shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart." Verse 20. Reference is to the days of his *past* life, in which were many things sad and sorrowful. He looks to the future, not to the past. Like the voyager who is just in port, he forgets the storms and tempests through which he has passed, and thinks only of the joyful greetings and re-unions before him. Bright angels have come to carry him to Abraham's bosom. Jesus, with face benignant and glowing with light, is ready to welcome him. And he almost hears the music of heavenly harps while his heartstrings are breaking; and he shouts, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

CHAPTER VI.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains some of the thoughts of the fifth. Solomon tells us that there had come under his own observation, *the opposite of what he had seen in* v. 18, 19. *There he had seen men* enjoying *the good things of this life:—here he had seen them* possessing, *but not enjoying them. The bearing of this chapter on the great question discussed,*—"What profit is there in this life without another?"—*is evident.*

Analysis. Ver. 1-12.

VERSES 1, 2. There is no advantage in *mere possession*, though it is a common evil to aim at possession, without securing its advantages.

3–6. The *miser*, though he should have many children, and live long, might better be an untimely birth.

7, 8. There is nothing earthly, that will satisfy any class.

9. Present enjoyment, however, is to be preferred to longings after what is denied us.

10. Solomon states that he has now *named every thing* that men seek happiness from; and that it is characteristic of man thus to seek. But man may not contend against God by making idols of earthly things.

11, 12. Man cannot find out *now*, what is good for himself or his posterity.

EXPOSITION.

1. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:*

2. *A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.*

There are many evils that are painfully common. Among these is *penuriousness*, so that a rich man, and a man otherwise honourable, cannot enjoy his wealth. "This" penuriousness "is an evil disease." It makes the

patient more restless than *fever;*—more useless than *palsy*. That penuriousness or covetousness is meant, appears from the verses following. *A stranger eateth it.* It is not unusual for the miser to be so much in dread lest his relatives get possession of his money, that he intrusts it to designing strangers, who eventually use it for their own purposes.

3. ¶ *If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he.*

In ancient times, more than now, those were esteemed peculiarly favoured, who had large families. "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Ps. cxxvii. 5. Long life, too, is always esteemed most desirable. This verse well exhibits the condition of the miser. His burial is not worthy to be called such:—it is a mere putting into the ground. "He hath no burial." He sometimes orders his funeral to be without any expense. And there is no loving heart to volunteer a tomb, or even a stone to mark the spot where his body lies. His life has been an abortion, and his death is a matter of no regret. A veritable untimely birth is better than he. Jehoiakim, king of Judah, was noted for his enormous rapacity and pursuit of iniquitous gain; and therefore the Lord said, "They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or Ah, sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, lord! or Ah, his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." Jer. xxii. 18, 19. But why is an untimely birth better than the miser? The answer is found in the next verses.

4. *For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness.*

5. *Moreover, he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.*

6. *Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?*

The old miser is remembered, if remembered at all, only to be despised; while the abortive has neither name nor remembrance. He has the mere shadow of an existence "without guilt, disgrace, pain, or punishment." He has *rest more than the other*—more than the miser who lives in restlessness and misery, and goes to the world of unrest and despair.

Do not all go to one place? All go to the grave, and it is better to know nothing of life than to know it only as a scene of wretchedness even for two thousand years. The longer his life, the less his rest. An eternal sleep broken only by a long restless life, had better not be broken at all. But blessed be God, there is a glorious, an eternal rest awaiting the people of God.

7. ¶ *All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.*

It was said to man immediately after his fall, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Gen. iii. 19. And we find that the most of the labour of life is to supply the wants of the body. "*Yet the appetite is not filled.*" Desire is not satisfied. Our Saviour says, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." He who seeks to slake his thirst with the water of earthly cisterns will become all the more thirsty. He will cry, "Give, give—more, more!" But the true way to make the best of life is to be content. "Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."

8. *For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?*

The wise man and the fool share alike. That is, if there is no future, the difference between them is unimportant. Many a wise man knowing how "to walk before the living,"—to transact his worldly business,—is poor. The man is poor, whoever he may be, wise or foolish, that either has no future existence, or has no future *happy* existence. To "walk before the living," is to walk before those who are *now* on the stage of action. And that man is indeed poor, who, though he can conduct himself wisely toward *them*, is not wise for the future. We might translate the last clause liberally thus: "What advantage hath the poor worldling that knoweth only to walk before men now living, and transact with them worldly business, and casteth no eye to the future?" This question falls in with the theme of Solomon's discourse. Stuart says, "*To 'walk* before the living,' is to behave with propriety and discretion before men." The word translated "living" means generally in this book, men now on the stage of action,—men in this world. See iv. 2, 15; vii. 2; ix. 4, 5.

9. ¶ *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.*

"*The sight of the eyes*, is the reality before us."* "*The wandering of the desire*," is hankering after something not possessed,—some *imaginary* good. Enjoyment of what we have, is better than wishing for what we have not. It is vanity and vexation of spirit thus to wish. Solomon had before shown that things actually possessed were unprofitable unless related to a future state. But now he teaches that to enjoy them as well as we can, is better

* Bridges.

than to be anxious about what we have not. Luther says, "Solomon's opinion is, that it is better to make use of that which lies before our eyes, that is, of what is now at hand, than that the soul go wandering to and fro. Solomon's will is that we make use of the present, thank God for it, and not think of anything else—like the dog in Æsop, which snapped at the shadow and let the flesh fall. What he intends then is that we should use that which God has given before our eyes, that which is now here, and be content therewith and not follow our own soul which is never satisfied: as he said before."

10. *That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.*

I have now "already" recited ("named") those things in which happiness or profit is supposed to consist. Solomon tells us at the beginning of his treatise, (i. 13, 14,) that he had been seeking and searching out all things that are done under heaven; and that he had "seen all the works done under the sun, that they were vanity." He goes on to name many things in the several intervening chapters:—and now he tells us that he has named them all. In his discourse thus far he has called by name, one after another, all supposed earthly good things, in answer to the question, "What profit is there under the sun?" We may recapitulate the good things which he has discussed thus far:—mirth, pleasure, laughter, wine; houses, vineyards, gardens, orchards of all kinds of fruits, pools; servants, maidens, great and small cattle, silver, gold, curiosities; men-singers, women-singers, musical instruments, (or wives;) laying up for children, greatness, wisdom, good deeds, authority, worship, honour, large families, long life, and longing desires for more things.

Perhaps this list contains *every good* for which men are anxious *in this life*. If there is no future life, they are all proved to be empty. "That which hath been is named already." "*And it is known that it is man.*" It is characteristic of *man* to seek happiness in such things. Or, *such is man!*—seeking vanity! "Verily every man at his best estate is altogether vanity." Ps. xxxix. 5.

"Neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he." He may not contend with God. In making creatures his chief good, he does thus contend. God says, "Seek happiness in *me*." Man replies, "No, I will seek it in creatures." He *may not* thus contend. It is sinful. —It is dangerous!

11. ¶ *Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?*

The old question here returns again in a new form. "What is man the better"—what advantage has man in all this toil—in these "many things that increase vanity?" We would suggest the following free translation:—"Truly there are many things (as seen above) that increase vanity! what advantage is there to man (in them all)?"

12. *For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?*

This is connected in sense with the verse above. What advantage is there to man, because who knoweth what is good for man in this life, &c.? The great question of the treatise remains unsolved; says Solomon. Nor is there anything to be hoped for from the future:—"Who can tell a man what shall be after him *under the sun?*" Hengstenberg says, that Solomon or the writer "does not speak of that which will come after this life, but means to say,

that no man knows what will happen to him after an hour, after a day, or after a year."

Solomon here ends a *division* of his subject; by this conclusion, that no one can find out any real good under the sun, leaving out of view the future world. In the following chapters, though the main theme is not changed, he uses many comparisons, showing that some earthly things are better than others.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Solomon tells us what* WILL NOT *give happiness:—Jesus, the "greater than Solomon," tells us what* WILL. Solomon could show nothing on earth that would give rest.—Jesus says, "I will give you rest." Both ask "What profit?" Solomon asks, "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" Jesus asks, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" His gifts contrast gloriously with those named in this book. Instead of sinful mirth and wine, he gives the joys of communion with himself,—joys that the world knows not of. And he has in reserve unbounded delight. "In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Instead of houses, vineyards, gardens, and orchards of rare and delicious fruits, Jesus has in reserve, mansions of glory, a paradise of joy, and the "twelve manner of fruits" upon the trees of life. Instead of pools—"broken cisterns that hold no water," he has in reserve, "the river of the water of life" flowing "from the throne of God and the Lamb." Instead of men-servants and maid-servants, he even now sends his angels as ministering spirits, to wait upon the heirs of salvation. Gabriel is not too great and too noble to watch over their path and their

pillow. Instead of the silver and gold that are corruptible, he counsels us to buy of him gold tried in the fire that we may be rich. Instead of men-singers, women-singers, and musical instruments, he will cause us to join the choir of "harpers harping with their harps." Instead of worldly wisdom, greatness, and distinction, he gives us the true wisdom. He makes us kings and priests, and we shall reign for ever. Instead of worship formal and heartless, he causes his people to worship in spirit and in truth, and will exalt them to the glorious worship of those who sing and praise with the angels. Instead of a long life of earthly care, he gives those who love him immortal youth, which, when ages or cycles are ended, shall only just be reaching forth to the immortality before it.

Ah, *all* is not vanity. "*Under* the sun" it may be, so far as it aspires to nothing higher. But *above* the sun, there are crowns, and palms, and harps, and mansions, and a *paradise* of bliss!

This world, too, has a glorious mission. It is the birth-place of millions of redeemed sinners, who, when earth shall be no more, shall live in glory, transferred from the burning earth to the incorruptible heavens.

And what will add inconceivable interest to the earth, while millions of ages hence seraphs shall read the record, will be the great fact that Jesus had his birth-place upon it; that it was the scene of his benevolent mission—of his redeeming grace. His tears moistened its dust—his sweat-drops ran down upon its sands—his gory blood was mingled with its soil!

II. *To contend with God is foolish and dangerous.* "Neither may (man) contend with him that is mightier than he." What is man? He is crushed before the moth! A blast of infected air carries him hence. One

vital chord snaps asunder, and he dies. He is weak, too, in virtue. At his best estate, he is altogether vanity. David, as a ruler, and only as a ruler, was a man after God's own heart. He was the sweet singer of Israel. His Psalms breathe forth devotion. And yet he fell. Peter, one of the most favoured of Christ's disciples, when left to himself, denied his Master with oaths. Shall any man, then, contend with God? It is a fearful contest;—the weak with the strong;—the ignorant with the wise;—the finite with the Infinite! The sinner is waging this war. The unconverted are fighting against their Maker. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker!" "But if God be for us, who can be against us?" "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "When I am weak, then am I strong."

"The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." Look at the worthies. "Through faith" they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." In the last great struggle, it will be a glorious thing to have the Lord on our side! The Christian conquers in the moment of dissolution. He comes to the battle, the final conflict, expecting to meet a terrible enemy. But lo! the enemy has fled. There is no foe to encounter. Jesus has already routed him. He came to the battle *before* us, and the enemy fled in dismay. And now it is not the cold arm of death that surrounds the dying believer:—it is the warm arm of Jesus. "Angels may minister to the saints

on *common* occasions, but when a Christian *dies*, Jesus himself attends." With Jesus I pass safely through the billows, and he says to my fluttering, fearing heart, "It is I, be not afraid."

"And when I'm to die,
Receive me, I cry,
For Jesus has loved me—I cannot tell why:
But this I can find—
We two are so joined
He'll not live in heaven, and leave me behind."

CHAPTER VII.

CONTENTS.

In the last chapter, Solomon tells us that he had named, (or called by name,) every thing that men sought profit from for this life, and that they each and all proved unsatisfactory.

Now he somewhat changes the subject, by showing that earthly vanities will soon end; and by showing that some things in this life are better than others, as leading us to consider and prepare for the future. We may secure good even here, by employing all with regard to a future account.

In comparing the states and dispositions of men, we learn that what they are discontented with as undesirable is better for them than what they long for. 1–10. *As we cannot change our earthly lot, or control our destiny, it remains that we seek the true wisdom, as giving life.* 11–15. *(If there is no hereafter,) a medium course between strict and uncompromising virtue on the one hand, and great wickedness on the other, is safest; but (there being a future,) God will eventually bring forth the righteous as gold tried in the furnace.* 16–18. *Imperfect as the best of men are, their piety is a better defence to their hearts than many mighty men are to a city; and malice will not injure them.* 19–22. *Solomon's search after wisdom and happiness in this world had resulted only in a painful discovery of human wickedness and woe.* 23–29.

Analysis. Verses 1-10.

VERSES 1–6. What to men seems most desirable is often the most worthless, and *vice versa.*

7. The extremes of being oppressed and of being promoted, are both dangerous.

8, 9. Patient, humble, waiting for the end, is better than anger, pride, and impatience.

10. It is not wise to be discontented with our present condition, as though the past had been better.

We may sum up these ten verses in the truthful sentence, Adversity improves the heart and exalts the character of the wise. The main points (according to Bishop Patrick) are these, viz.:

A good name is better than precious ointment.

The day of death is better than the day of birth.

Mourning is better than feasting.

Sadness is better than laughter.
Rebukes are better than praise.
The end is better than the beginning. And
The patient suffering spirit is better than a stout and haughty spirit.

EXPOSITION.

1. *A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.*

In this verse, as in the 5th and 6th, Hebrew words of similar sound are brought together. This paronomasia is not unfrequent in the Hebrew language; and seems very suitable for proverbial expressions. We have the same thing in English. "He that goes borrowing goes sorrowing," is an example. In this verse we have in Hebrew, *Tov shem me shemmen*,—better is a good name than precious ointment. The value of a good name is incalculable, if deserved.

There are many references in the Bible to ointment. Among the orientals it was much more in use than now with us. It was especially a mark of festivity. "Anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou mayest not appear unto men to fast." Brotherly love is compared to precious ointment. Ps. cxxxiii. 2. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart." Prov. xxvii. 9. "My name is as ointment poured forth." Cant. i. 3. The idea of this verse is, that there is a precious savour in a good name. A good name is the aroma of virtue. Mary felt that she could bring no more precious gift to Jesus, than to pour upon his sacred person the costly box of spikenard. She meant it to be an emblem of Jesus' virtue. But the odour of that deed of love has been wafted to all lands, and will continue to perfume her name till the end of time. She did not desire praise. We ought not to desire it. But we may desire, and ought to maintain, a good reputation. A *good* name is better than a *great* name. It gives influence,—

the counsel of a man of good reputation is heeded,—his example is followed.

The day of the good man's death is better than the day of his birth. At his birth, he is introduced into a world of sin and sorrow. At his death, he is introduced into a world of purity and joy. The day of death, so much dreaded by many, is a good day to the righteous. To depart and be with Christ, is far better than to live in this world of sorrow; even with its brightest joys at one's bidding.

Dr. Hengstenberg says, "The first clause has no internal connection whatever with the second: the means adopted to point out such a connection have been plainly artificial and far-fetched." Dr. Hamilton on the other hand very plausibly shows a beautiful connection. He shows that to the owner of a good name the day of death is better than the day of birth.

2. *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.*

This verse and those that follow correspond with the teaching of our Lord in the fifth chapter of Matthew. "Blessed are the poor in spirit.—Blessed are they that mourn," &c. Our experience teaches us that scenes of affliction and sorrow have a mellowing effect upon the heart. You return from the sick-chamber a better man. If you have sympathized with the bereaved, you have done like Jesus, and your fare becomes sweeter and your pillow softer from the performance of the act of kindness.

"He that hath soothed a widow's woe,
Or wiped an orphan's tear, doth know
There's something here of heaven."

It seems evident that "the house of mourning" means

the house where there is mourning on account of the death of some one in it. The Hebrew word אבל translated mourning is generally used concerning mourning for the dead. But the last part of the verse is conclusive;—"That (death) is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." On the other hand, if you go to the house of feasting and revelry, though you may have a little temporary pleasure, recollections of wasted time and sinful joys will follow you to your bed-chamber; and plant your pillow with thorns;—your heart will not be at rest. Feasting may cause us to forget our mortality. To prevent this, the Egyptians brought coffins into their feasts.

3. *Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

4. *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

The same subject is continued. It is God's grace that makes us better by sorrow. "The sorrow of the world worketh death." They who like the Pharisees disfigured their faces, that they might be *seen of men* to fast and mourn, were none the better for it, but the worse. Our present state is a state of *discipline:* we are in a course of training. And we need checks and crosses to prepare us for the stern realities of this life, and to make heaven the more blessed. Hence if we are "made sorry after a godly manner" it "worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of." 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10.

5. *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.*

David says, (Ps. cxli. 5,) "Let the righteous smite me;

it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." Yet many resent a rebuke, as though it necessarily came from an enemy. And few have the wisdom to rebuke or admonish with a right spirit. It requires caution, meekness, and love. But "open rebuke is better than secret love."

"The song of fools" may refer to a song in *commendation* of a person; and if so, it is in contrast with "the rebuke of the wise." It was better for David to be made "the song of the drunkards"—their song in disrespect—than to have their song of commendation.

6. *For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.*

In these two verses (5, 6,) we have another Hebrew paronomasia—*shir, sir, sirim*—translated song, pot, thorns. Fuel in Palestine was often scarce. A few thorns would make a momentary blaze, and a crackling noise, but produce but little heat. So the laughter of fools is mere noise, causeless and useless—presently to be exchanged for sorrow. David says of his enemies, "They are quenched as a fire of thorns." Ps. cxviii. 12. Their end is sudden and sad. These instructions are worthy of our attention, not merely for the season of "Lent," but at all times. Those who feel it to be a duty to abstain from promiscuous dancing and other improper sports during Lent, but who indulge freely at other times, should read these verses carefully—prayerfully.

7. *Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.*

Solomon had seen oppression, if not in Israel in other countries. And he often refers to it as a great calamity

to the oppressed. (See iii. 16; iv. 1; v. 8.) Oppression means, actively, inflicting suffering on another;—passively, enduring suffering from another. Here it means the latter. Many a subject—many a slave—has been made frantic by the galling yoke that crushed him. Solomon's own son Rehoboam enraged his subjects by threatening to increase their already heavy burdens, and ten tribes revolted from him. Jeremiah acted like a madman, when, after being smitten by Pashur, and put in the stocks, (Jer. xx. 2,) he cursed his day. (Jer. xx. 14–18.) The righteous are in danger of putting forth their hands to iniquity, when the rod of the wicked rests upon their lot. Ps. cxxv. 3. Dr. Clark translates the first part of this verse, "Oppression shall give lustre to a wise man." The sentiment is in accordance with that of previous verses.

"A gift (bribe) destroyeth (corrupteth) the heart." Bribery has been employed in all ages, especially for the sake of obtaining or retaining office. The two parts of the verse seem to be connected in meaning thus—the subject or slave is equally injured and wronged, whether his lord seek to make him do wrong by punishment or bribery. By the first he is provoked—by the last he is corrupted.

8. *Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof; and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

Prof. Stuart says that the writer means, "that the *end* of this matter of oppressing will show at last the true state of the thing; and that it is better to wait—to exercise *forbearance of mind*, than *haughtily* to resent the injuries received." The oppressed shall have deliverance, if not sooner, at death. Let them be patient. Let them think of the final end. iii. 11–17. Jacob looked only at "the beginning" when he said, "All these things are *against* me." When he saw "the end," he exclaimed with satis-

faction, "It is enough." See Job, 1st chapter and xlii. 12. Also James v. 11.

Be patient to the end. "Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

9. *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.*

The preceding sentiment is enforced with the additional reason that it is the part of folly to nurse up wrath.

10. *Say not, Why is it that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.*

Here is another evidence of the unsatisfying nature of this world. Any thing but what we have, is thought good. "Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." The past, we imagine, was far better than the present:—but it is mere imagination. The past had its cares and trials as well as the present. Old men often think that every thing is now wrong, because changed from the usages of their youthful days. But it is not wise to vex one's self on account of changes which may after all be better instead of worse. It is better to complain of the badness of our own hearts than of the badness of the times. Taken as a whole, the world has, no doubt, been improving from the first ages till now; and it will improve till the millennium ushers in the latter-day glory.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

1. *A good name is precious in this world of sin.* Good men should be imitated and admired, though they ought not to be flattered. When they die, their virtues may be eulogized for the imitation of mankind. Ere the box of precious ointment be broken, its fragrance can hardly be confined or concealed. But when broken, like Mary's alabaster box of ointment poured upon the head of Jesus, its odour fills the room and the surrounding at-

mosphere. The box is broken when the good man dies: and thus the day of his death is better than the day of his birth. The incense of a holy life is now in the censer, and it fills the whole temple with its fragrance. A good name, if deserved, is invaluable. It has power while the possessor lives. It is embalmed in many hearts when he dies. "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." A good name is written in heaven. Let not "a little folly" give ill savour to our otherwise fragrant characters. How valuable to us as examples are the histories of good men! Abel's name has come down to us as fragrant as the incense. "He being dead, yet speaketh." Enoch's name is like sweet ointment. What instructive biographies have we, in the faithful Abraham, the obedient Isaac, the wrestling Jacob, the pure Joseph, the meek and earnest Moses, the patient and reverential Job, the incorruptible Samuel, the loving and disinterested Jonathan, the good Hezekiah, the pious Josiah, the firm and noble Daniel, the zealous John the Baptist, the loving and earnest sons of Zebedee—James and John, Paul glowing with holy ardour for the salvation of men, and Barnabas "a good man full of faith and the Holy Ghost."

There were female worthies too not less conspicuous in their sphere:—the praying Hannah, the heroic Deborah, the affectionate Ruth, the generous Abigail, the courageous Esther, the sweet, gentle, humble Marys, the benevolent Dorcas, the kind and active Phœbe, and Lois and Eunice, whose record is that their faithful teachings resulted in the piety of their posterity! Tens of thousands, since Scripture history was written, might be added to the catalogue. Some of them, however, like the sweet flower in the desert, have hardly been known. No one has written their history. Hamilton says, "The Inquisition has, no doubt, extinguished many an Antipas; and in the

Sodoms of our earth many a Lot has vexed his soul, and died with no Pentateuch to preserve his memory."

But the good man at least leaves a valuable inheritance to his children, that of an unsullied life. Let our children be able to stand with head erect when we are gone, and pronounce our names with pride and affection. There is no better heir-loom than the name of a good and pious and noble ancestor.

But to have a good name we must have a good character. There can be no shadow without a substance—no fragrance without the ointment—no good name without a good life. They are not noble who do noble acts for the mere sake of fame or distinction: but they are truly noble who *love* to do right. If we *seek* distinction, it will likely elude our grasp. But if we earnestly and honestly *do our duty*, an appreciating public will sooner or later acknowledge our worth. We should do the work of life from a sense of duty and the pleasure of doing right. Then we need not be anxious about the opinion of friends or foes.

II. *A patient spirit is invaluable.* "The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." (Ver. 8.) "Through faith and patience" the righteous "inherit the promises." Patience as a Christian grace results from faith. "The trying of your faith worketh patience." Jas. i. 3. The man who has not patience to wait till God fulfils his promises, has little or no faith. He cannot trust his heavenly Father to bring about his promises in his own time. It is in this sense that "he that believeth shall not make haste:"—he shall not be impatient and try to hasten what is not to be hastened. Many a professor of religion would be in earnest to-day if he could reach eternal life thereby to-morrow. But because his Lord delayeth his coming, he relaxes in duty, and perhaps turns back again

to the world. We are to labour on in hope: and "if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." We are to wait for the *end;* and the end will be better to us than the beginning. The end of life will be the end of sin. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (Jas. v. 7, 8.)

"Patience is power." The silent dew and the gentle shower do a better work than the sweeping tempest. The patient, toiling, enduring man, does a better work than the noisy and turbulent. The mother quietly forming the habits of her darling boy,—the Sabbath-school teacher giving silent lessons of truth,—the minister toiling on amid discouragements;—these have power. The farmer sows this year for the frost, and next year for the drought. Shall he therefore fret and murmur and be angry at Providence; and declare that he will sow no more? No, let him sow again, and his barn will be filled with golden sheaves, and his granaries with ripe corn. "Let patience have her perfect work." A soldier had received a letter from his loving sister just as he was about to enter the bloody battle of Fair Oaks. It was unread, for the call to arms was in haste. As he afterward lay on the ground a bleeding captive, he opened the letter and read, as quoted from Dr. Byrom:

> "With patient mind, the course of duty run:
> God nothing does, or suffers to be done,
> But thou would'st do thyself, could'st thou but see
> The end of all events as well as he."

It was enough for his faith. He was happy. And he afterward realized that it was true.

III. *It is not wise to inquire why ancient times were better than the present.* It cannot be denied that there was a golden age—a paradise of bliss. Its period, however, was so brief that it could hardly be called an *age*. Then man held sweet intercourse with God; and God spake to man with a Father's words of cheer. No rebukes fell from his lips;—his hand grasped no chastising rod. But the apostasy was a sudden fall from light to darkness—from holiness to sin—from safety and bliss to ruin. Till the flood there was little else than violence and blood. After the flood, idolatry soon covered the world with its corruption. Oppression became as universal as human power and human depravity could make it. Those former days were not better than these.

But we take higher ground, and assert that these days are better than former days. The Christian religion is making certain progress toward its final, its universal triumph. When the new-born religion of Jesus descended to men, it was a day of joy. Angels sang "Peace on earth, good will to men." But even those days were not as good as the present, for the true religion was not then extended as now over so large a portion of the earth.

When the Roman emperor Constantine established Christianity by law, it seemed to be a happy day for its friends. But the strong hand which was reached forth to protect religion was diseased; and Christianity caught the contagion, and pined under its influence. *These days are better* than those of the age of Constantine.

When Luther and his coadjutors broke the yoke of a corrupt and oppressive hierarchy, it seemed a day of ransom. Great and good men rallied for the truth. But it was a time of conflict, and bitterness. The blood of the witnesses for the truth flowed like water. *These days are better* than those of the Reformation.

When God poured out his Spirit upon our fathers in Scotland and in America, it was a happy day. The church was baptized afresh. But the divine influence was not so extensively exerted as at this day. *These days are even better* than those of our fathers.

There are errors it is true, but they are generally old errors revived. Truth and Christianity are this day more firmly settled in the hearts of men, and more extensively propagated than at any former period. Amid the ebbings and flowings of the tides of truth and error, error is receding and truth advancing. *Former days were not better than these.*

IV. *It is not wise to inquire why our own more early days were better than the present.* Men advanced in years, often look back with a kind of melancholy regret to the days of their youth. Experience has dissipated many a dream, which though but a dream was very pleasant. The golden winged butterfly has no more charms, and the rainbow has not yet been seized, and the hope has fled that it ever will be. The man advancing in years can hardly divest himself of the thought that the skies were brighter in his youth than now:—that friends were truer, that home was more attractive;—that tastes, and sights, and sounds were more pleasing. He has a kind of "pensive autumn feeling" in looking at the past. Gray hairs, like faded leaves are upon his temples: and the sun of his strength is "westering." Many an old man believes that things have changed more than they have. The change has been upon *the man* rather than upon the objects around him.

Indeed every season of life has its joys and its sorrows. Every season may be made miserable by passion and discontent; or happy and useful by a cheerful spirit—by

trust in God—and by efforts to do right. The *first ten* years are the season of *present enjoyment* regardless of the future. And though this period of childhood is a moulding, and therefore an important period; still in the history of one's life it seems to be a blank. It is the mere *bud* of being.

The *second ten* years are the season of *hope*. This is not the *bud* of being but the *blossom* of life. In this season of youth, there is a rapid advance from childhood to manhood. It is the season for forming habits,—for laying the foundation for knowledge. The heart is buoyant with the expectation of good to be realized hereafter.

The *third ten* years (from 20 to 30) is the season for *experiment* and *enterprise*. Hopes are sought to be realized. If not before, the business of life is now selected. The blossom has fallen, and the fruit takes shape. Wise observers can tell what kind of fruit appears to be in store. It is in a *physical* point of view that the fruit is unripe; for in a *moral* point of view it matures sometimes even in childhood. Children sometimes by God's grace are made ripe for glory and taken home. Sometimes they are sanctified in infancy, and have a long life of usefulness before they go to their reward.

The *fourth ten* years (from 30 to 40) is the time for more *successful activity*. Persons of enterprise act with great effect. The fancy is lively, and chastened by experience. Enthusiasm is brought to bear upon the business of life, but it is zeal coupled with knowledge.

The *fifth ten* years (from 40 to 50) is characterized by a mature judgment. The ardency of the last period has not much abated, but it is still further modified by experience and discernment. The mental powers arrive at their acme. Weight of character increases. The fruit is ripe.

The *sixth ten* years (from 50 to 60) is often the most useful period of a good man's life. "The highest point of *mental power* is at *fifty;* the highest point of *influence* at *sixty*." The knowledge of men and things is greater than at any former period. The fruit is fully ripe.

The *seventh* ten years (from 60 to 70) is characterized by a rich and varied *experience*. Earth is not so attractive to the good man of this age, as it was in his younger years. He is more *venerated*. And very often his judgment and influence have not begun to be impaired. The fruit is now mellow.

The *eighth* ten years (from 70 to 80) has many redeeming points, though memory and some of the other mental powers are beginning to fail. The good man, at this age, is revered, and his patient continuance in well-doing amid all the infirmities of old age, is a standing lesson to all around, of the value of laying up a store of virtuous principles when young.

And even after 80 years, the patriarch's influence for good is often wonderful. There is even in what is sometimes called "second childhood," a beauty and an influence truly delightful. The moral and religious character is mellowed "into the rich ripeness of an old age, made sweet and tolerant by experience." Youth, then, with its hopes, is better than childhood with its mere sensual enjoyment. And manhood with its earnest work and usefulness is better still. And advancing years with accumulated experience and matured judgment is far better. And mellow old age, just passing into heaven, is best of all. "Say not that the former days were better than these." It is only an old age of sin that makes former days better than these. Those days are best that are spent for the glory of God and the good of men. Christians, repine not though you may now suffer afflictions. Brighter days

are before you. "Now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed." Soon you will enjoy days without want, or tears, or sickness, or sin:—days without a night, for Jesus is the light of heaven. God "will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality; eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God."—Rom. ii. 6–11.

Analysis. Verses 11-18.

These verses show lights and shadows, and virtue struggling and overcoming.

VERSES 11, 12. The value of true wisdom.

13. No one can make his earthly lot without a crook in it.

14. The same truth. Adversity must accompany prosperity in this mixed scene, according to God's appointment, to the end that man should find nothing to explain the enigma of this life (if there is no future.)

15. Accordingly rewards (in this life) are not according to merit. (From this we are led to infer a future.)

16, 17. If you live for this world merely, take a medium course, between strict and uncompromising virtue on the one hand, and great wickedness on the other; as this will preserve from martyrdom and from self-destruction.

18. But the truly pious man, "he that feareth God," shall come forth from every trial as pure gold unharmed of the furnace.

EXPOSITION.

11. *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.*

Several interpretations have been given to this passage.

1st. The *wisdom of this world* assists a man in managing his inheritance. But this is a truism that Solomon hardly meant to utter. Nor do we see its connection with the subject discussed. 2d. *Heavenly wisdom*—religion, enables us to use the world for its true object. This interpretation seems to be a good one. 3d. The marginal reading says, "Wisdom is as good as an inheritance; yea, better, too." This view seems preferable; as comparisons and contrasts characterize this chapter. Religion is better than all earthly goods. "And it is profit to them that see the sun"—to living men. It is profitable, even for *this life*. This seems to be the force of the expression, "to them that *see the sun*." It corresponds with the apostle's declaration, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8. The verse may be translated freely, thus: Piety is good, enabling its possessor to use properly his worldly goods; and is thus profitable for this life. "*Those who see the sun*," says Stuart, "means living men abroad in the world of action; compare vi. 5; xi. 7. So the Greeks ὁρᾶν φαος is equivalent to ζῆν; and so the Latins, *Diem videre*."

This confirms the view taken of Solomon's theme, i. 3, where "*under the sun*" is regarded as equivalent to—*for this life*.

The view that we have taken of the meaning of this verse seems to be corroborated by the next verse.

12. *For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.*

While wisdom and money are both useful, (as a defence,) *true wisdom* giveth life to its possessor. Literally, "The excellency of knowledge-wisdom makes its pos-

sessor live." By knowledge-wisdom we are no doubt to understand *true* wisdom, or piety. The two words, knowledge and wisdom, are used to make it emphatic—wisdom *par excellence*. It gives *life*, even spiritual, eternal LIFE! It gives what does not belong to this world—what will not end with this world. Wisdom says, (Prov. viii. 35,) "Whoso findeth me findeth life." "The fear of the Lord, this is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding." These verses (11 and 12) do not answer the question discussed in this treatise—what advantage hath this life without another? but they tell us that true religion is that which benefits us in this life, and which prepares us for and gives us life eternal.

13. *Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?*

This verse is the same as verse 15 of the first chapter, only put in the interrogatory form to make it emphatic. That which God has made crooked cannot be made straight by human devices.

Consider. Look at it with wonder or delight. Or, be silent, admire, and wait for the result. So far from repining at crooked things—afflictions—we should look at them with earnest delight as ordered by God. They are for some important end. That "crooked" in this verse refers to adversity seems evident from the next verse.

14. *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

Literally, In the day of good, be good; but in the day of evil, look. For God hath set this over against this to the end that man should not find anything after. In pros-

perity it is proper to be joyful and thankful. But in adversity, which is the "crooked" of the preceding verse, we ought to consider, reflect, and, if possible, discover why God sends his chastisement.

God has put sweet and bitter in every man's cup. He has marked out our path, though it often leads us where we do not like to go. In the natural world we have storms and sunshine alternately. And so is it in our business and enjoyments. In the day of prosperity we need a thorn in the flesh to humble us. In the day of adversity we need a cordial to support us. "Stay me with flagons —comfort me with apples."

God has set prosperity and adversity over against each other in men's history. Why? "To the end that man should find (find out) nothing after him." The meaning is somewhat obscure at the first glance. But the sentiment corresponds with ix. 1, where it says, "No man knoweth either love or hatred (whether God loves or hates him) by all that is before them." God's outward dealings furnish no clue as to God's love to us. They are various, that we may not know what is to be our future lot. "Man can find out nothing after him;" *i. e.*, no satisfactory explanation after all his inquiries, *if this life is man's entire existence.* And the next verse corroborates this view.

15. *All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.*

Solomon relates again his own observation of what had happened. *In the days of his vanity*, probably means the days of his former life, which he calls vanity, because viewed in itself life is vanity, as he was showing all along. In ix. 9, the "days of vanity" are made to correspond

with days "under the sun," and with "this life;" all of which forms are used. Solomon had even seen a just man perishing by untimely death "in his righteousness" —*by* his righteousness. Literally, "Here is a righteous man destroyed for the sake of his righteousness." The preposition ב frequently means, *by*, or *for the sake of, because of*. (See Gesenius Lex.) See this meaning in 2 Kings xiv. 6; Jonah i. 14. He had also seen a wicked man prolonging his life by his wickedness. This is one of those apparently "crooked" things mentioned in verse 13, and referred to in verse 14. By upholding the right, men often become martyrs. By upholding sin, they often live long! This is unaccountable on the supposition that there is no other life. A writer in the Princeton Review, (for Jan. 1857,) considers this verse the key to the whole book. He says, "The problem really discussed is the seeming inequalities of Divine Providence." The discussion of the question *why it is so*, (as stated in this verse,) is supposed by the writer in the Review to be the object of Ecclesiastes. But it would be strange indeed to find a man's subject stated only in the middle or last part of his discourse! As an illustration of the great theme announced, i. 3, this verse is altogether to the point. If there is no other world, the righteous are no better off than the wicked! Often the righteous man falls by violence, while the cunning wicked man lives. And the next verses (16, 17,) show us what is our most prudent course if there is no other life.

16. *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?*

17. *Be not over-much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?*

Be neither too good and conscientious, nor too wicked.

These verses confirm the interpretation which we have given to the Book of Ecclesiastes. Without another life, it is better to take *a medium* course. Avoid being over-much righteous on the one hand, and over-much wicked on the other. In the former case you make yourself a martyr. In the latter, you die before your time. (In the original it is *fit time:* why die before the proper time?) The very wicked often die as it were prematurely,—by violence, intemperance, or by the executioner. "Over-wise" and "foolish," correspond with "over-much righteous" and "over-much wicked." Righteousness is wisdom:—wickedness is folly. Such parallelisms are common in the Hebrew. If one would avoid premature death, let him be neither too righteous nor too wicked. *In medio tutissimus ibis,*—you will go most securely in the middle way. Had this rule been adopted, Abel and Zacharias might have escaped martyrdom:—Stephen, James, and Peter, might have lived in earthly ease, and for a longer time. The early Christians,—the Huguenots and Covenanters of later time,—might have avoided those terrible persecutions, the very recital of which causes us to shudder. On the other hand, Absalom, and Ahithophel, and Haman, and Judas, and Herod, might have lived to old age. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah might have been preserved. The first class were too righteous for their own safety:—the last class were too wicked to be spared. This seems to be the only *satisfactory* explanation of the verses. A wrong interpretation has made this a favourite text of those who wished to be considered religious, but who wished at the same time to live careless and godless lives. To men of "easy virtue," everything above *their own standard* of piety and integrity is being righteous over-much. It is a handy text for the formalist, the careless; and even for the intemperate,

the Sabbath-breaker, and the profane. To sanctify the Sabbath, to worship God in one's family, to avoid vain amusements, to suffer rather than sin,—these are to be "righteous over-much," according to the views of many. Every man, judging for himself, is consoled in his shortcomings by the supposition that those more godly or more moral than he are too righteous.

Other interpreters, however, consider the direction 1st as a caution against fanaticism; 2d as a caution against making too high pretensions; 3d as a warning against the use of human inventions in God's worship—will worship; and 4th as a charge against attempts to *merit* God's favour by our own works. These are plausible interpretations; but many difficulties attend them. (1.) Their bearing upon the subject does not appear. (2.) There is a contrast between *real* virtue and *real* wickedness. It cannot for a moment be admitted that Solomon approved of moderate wickedness, when he said "Be not *over-much* wicked." He never impliedly commended either moderate virtue or moderate wickedness, except as a preservative of life, and on the supposition of there being no hereafter. The true explanation seems to be this:—If there is no future world, let us make the best we can of this; avoiding the extremes of too much zeal for God, and too much wickedness. There is another interpretation by Hammond and Benson. They make the sixteenth verse the language of an objector, and the seventeenth a reply to it by Solomon. But the difficulty in this view is, the reply does not meet the objection.

18. *It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.*

All this (this and that) stated above, ought to be con-

sidered. The word כ here translated "for" may be rendered *yet, nevertheless*. If so translated, we have the doctrine, that whatsoever we may say of prudence in its power to preserve the present life; "nevertheless he that feareth God" shall come forth from all trials eventually unharmed. Yes, he shall come forth from the trials of life to the judgment, radiant with glory. He shall come forth as gold tried in the fire. "He that feareth God" is the *truly pious* man. "The fear of the Lord" or "of God" is an expression very often used in the word of God, and it means *piety*. See Ps. cxi. 10, and Prov. ix. 10; i. 7. We find the phrase in its verbal or nominal form in this book several times. See iii. 14; viii. 12; xii. 13. For further explanation consult exposition of v. 7.

The good man "shall come forth" from all the trials of life, and be rewarded in heaven. "They that be wise shall shine as brightness; and they that turn many to righteousness, as stars, for ever and ever."

Here are rays of light beaming down upon our darkness! Here we see that God's people shall have a final reward. There *is* advantage in this life, because there is *another life*. If we *fear the Lord*, this life will develope into a glorious life above!

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

Thoughtful and serious attention to God's works and dealings is a high duty. "Consider the work of God. In the day of adversity, consider." 13, 14. All God's works are wonderful! They may well fill us with awe and delight. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Ps. cxi. 2. God's works of providence have been reflected upon with great comfort by the wise and good of all ages. And there are seasons when the most inconsiderate are compelled to

see the hand of God. There are stripes inflicted by our Father's hand, "fewer than our crimes, and lighter than our guilt;" which wean us from sin, and elevate our hearts to heaven, the home of rest. When chastised we should reflect upon several important things.

(1.) We should consider that it is a Father's hand that chastises. Deut. viii. 5: "Thou shalt also consider in thy heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

See that fond father! Every longing of his soul is for the welfare of his boy. The reins of government are in his hand, and love is in his heart. Now he caresses with paternal fondness—now he leads by the hand—now he takes the rod and chastises! It is the same loving father still. So God is our Father when he chastises, as he is when he gives us cordials. Ye weeping sufferers, look up to that face beaming with love, and know that there is a heart of compassion which yearns over you. Nestle then, close to that heart. In your Father's arms—on your Father's bosom—you may sob away your sorrows and sink into the sleep of death.

(2.) Consider the *cause* of affliction. Say with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." We have not to go far to discover the fatal cause of all our griefs. "When thou with rebukes dost chasten man *for his iniquity*, thou makest his beauty to consume away as a moth." Ps. xxxix. 11. The whole creation groaneth, because sin, whose wages is death, has fallen as a leprosy upon it. So inveterate is this malady, that unless the blood of Christ is applied as a healing balm, the consequence is death—unending death!

(3.) Let us consider the *gracious object* of affliction. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious

than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. i. 7.) God chastises us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Heb. xii. 10.)

The gold is cast into the furnace, that it may be purified. The diamond is cut, that it may sparkle. The aromatic plant is pressed, that its fragrance may fill the air. So the child of God suffers, that he may be adorned with the beauty of holiness, and shine as a gem in his Saviour's diadem of glory.

(4.) Let us consider how we may *obtain support*. "In the day of trouble I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me." (Ps. lxxxvi. 7.) The arm of God can certainly sustain the sinking heart, when it sustains the universe. He is rich unto all that call upon him. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

(5.) Let us consider how to anticipate *final and complete deliverance*. God's loved ones, after having come "through great tribulation," and "having washed their garments, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," shall stand before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more, nor be oppressed with grief, but be led to the fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. By such considerations we may be comforted in the darkest hour; and may nerve our hearts for life's great work.

II. *True wisdom giveth life*. It does not always preserve natural life. The blood of Abel and of Stephen, crying to heaven, proclaim the contrary. The long list of martyrs who stood up for the truth, and were therefore tortured and slain, with one voice proclaim the contrary.

The massacre of St. Bartholomew's night, and the racks, and tortures, and deaths of the Inquisition, all declare the contrary. But still, true wisdom—piety giveth life—*eternal life*. Yes, "he that feareth God shall come forth of them all." He shall come forth from the trial, as Joseph, shielded by innocence. He shall come forth, as the three children of Israel from the fiery furnace of the king of Babylon, for a fourth—"like the Son of God" is with them. He shall come forth on the morn of the resurrection, purified and glorified, to receive an everlasting reward. There the inequalities of this life will be rectified. The just man will not *then* perish in his righteousness. Nor will the wicked man have life in his wickedness. But "he that feareth God will come forth" in the presence of the universe *approved!* "The day shall declare it." To come forth approved in that day, our sins must be pardoned through the blood of Christ. And our hearts must be renewed by the Holy Spirit, to fit us for our new and glorious home. If thus prepared for a final approval, our death will be safe, whether we die on a bed of down with hearts of love around us melting with sympathy; or whether we die on a martyr's stake, girt round with hearts of hate, and mouths filled with cursings. The glory of God will come streaming down upon our eyes closing in death, from the portals of heaven; and foretastes of glory will be enjoyed in the agonies of dissolution. The next moment we shall enter those portals, shouting "*victory*."

Analysis. Verses 19–29.

In this passage we have man in all his phases of character. Made upright! *fallen!*—wise to secure good—wise to invent evil. Seeking wisdom;—falling under the power of seduction. In his best estate, imperfect;—in his worst estate, wicked, foolish, mad! Even woman, who is ordinarily among the good, sometimes outstripping the other sex in her depravity. Alas for poor human nature!

VERSES 19, 20. These verses teach that, imperfect as the best of men are, their piety is a better defence to their hearts than many mighty men (chieftains with their soldiers) are to a city.

21, 22. Even the words of slander and malice will not grievously affect them.

23–29. Solomon's search after wisdom and happiness in this world had resulted only in a painful discovery of human wickedness and human woe.

EXPOSITION.

19. *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.*

Ten mighty men:—a round number put for many. Neh. iv. 12. Instead of "mighty men," Stuart renders it "chieftains of troops." As Solomon is speaking of *defence*, this translation seems very appropriate. "Shalit (שליט) is one who rules in any way." "Sultan is an Arabic form from the root of this same word."* The chieftains imply that there are also troops under them. The meaning is, Wisdom strengthens the wise man (defends him from temptation) more than many chieftains with their troops defend a city. In Proverbs xxv. 28, Solomon compares a man "that hath no rule over his own spirit" to "a city that is broken down, and without walls." In verses 11, 12, wisdom is said to be better than riches—here it is said to be better than strength. It is the best kind of strength. *Human* wisdom may preserve a *city* in time of peril, (ix. 13–18.) But *divine* wisdom—piety,

* Stuart.

preserves the *heart* of its possessor. It preserves the whole man. Joseph is a bright example. Sorely was he assailed by one whose heart was as "snares and nets." But his heart was fortified by grace. The good man is a strong man. He is under the shadow of the Almighty—he dwells in a munition of rocks.

20. *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*

Critics have had much trouble in connecting the sense of this passage with the context. But if we render כי (ki) *albeit* instead of *for*, much of the difficulty vanishes. The two verses (19, 20,) might be transposed thus, and then the meaning of the passage becomes more apparent. "Albeit there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not; (yet) piety (imperfect as it is) strengthens its possessor more than many chieftains strengthen a city." Man being everywhere imperfect, needs to be strengthened and defended. Piety (wisdom) is the only strengthening principle for the heart—the only defence. In this verse we have a decisive proof that there is no perfect, no sinless man on earth. Dr. Clark, (who is a very partial interpreter of Scripture where Arminian or Calvinistic doctrines are involved,) renders "sinneth not"—"is not *liable* to sin." But he has not the shadow of justification for such a translation. To preserve the doctrine of sinless perfection, he had recourse to this rendering.

21. *Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:* 22. *For often-times also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.*

We are endangered by hearing words of provocation and slander. Many a good man has been put off his

guard by unkind or abusive remarks. Hence the importance of this caution in connection with the heart's being strengthened with wisdom. *Do not resent* the ill language by which you are abused or slandered. It is characteristic of true wisdom that it does not resent the words of others. Some words come from those whose opinions are not worth caring for,—"thy servant." Others are spoken rashly. Others are the sudden outburst of passion. Others may be true; and we ought not to be offended at the truth. It is very foolish to be too much troubled about what is said of us. (The word "curse" may be rendered, *reproach, rail at.*) Besides, *in heart* thou hast reproached others, if thou hast not done it in words.

23. *All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.* 24. *That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?*

Though the wisest man of his time, Solomon was obliged to confess that he was unable to fathom some things in his own experience. He gathered pearls of wisdom, but some of them were far down in the ocean's bed, *deep, deep,* where he could not find them. The Psalmist found wisdom too *high* for him. Of the ways of God, he says; "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Ps. cxxxix. 6. So it is with our efforts to find out the grace of God. Its height, and depth, and length, and breadth, cannot be explored. Our knowledge is low and shallow, while our ignorance is extensive, abundant. The wisest on earth are children, fools, in knowledge. Solomon, in his struggle for wisdom, though outstripping Heman and Darda and all the learned men of his time, was far from the goal after which he was striving. In the 23d verse Solomon tells us that the instrument by which he had been testing other things was wis-

dom. Now he tests the instrument itself. "*All this*" probably refers to all the former part of the treatise.

25. *I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.*

Solomon did not take a cursory glance merely. He sought with *all his heart*. (Marg. "I and my heart compassed.") And not content with facts, he sought for principles—"the *reason* of things." Also he sought by a sad *experience*, "the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness." He refers in this to the folly and sin of being ensnared, as he was, by strange women; as he intimates in the next verse. Hengstenberg says, on this verse, "thought, musing, meditation, (compare chap. ix. 10, where *thought* is connected with *work*, the former being the spiritual element from which the latter proceeds forth) is put in opposition to the blind impulses and passions by which the common man allows himself to be led."

26. *And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.*

On this verse Dr. Hengstenberg comments thus: "There can be no doubt that by the *woman* spoken of here, we are not to understand a common prostitute, but an *ideal person*, to wit, *false wisdom*, which kept constantly undertaking excursions and sallies from her proper home, the heathen world, into the territory of the Israelites. It does little honour to the exegesis of the present day that it has so frequently mistaken this plain and evident truth. The feeling for the allegorical element in Scripture is still, alas! very little developed; and a false occidental realism largely prevails no less amongst certain orthodox, than amongst

rationalistic interpreters. A woman in the common sense does not suit the connection: whereas the ideal does. Before and afterwards Koheleth (the Preacher) speaks of the great difficulty of attaining to true wisdom. The ground whereof is specially that along-side of the wisdom that is from above, there is a fleshly wisdom which entangles man in her snares and is the mother of the "inventions" alluded to in verse 29. Then further, it must be remembered, an ideal female person, namely, Koheleth the Assembling One, is here speaking: and if this person warns us against another female, as the most dangerous enemy of the human race, we may reasonably presume that the latter is also ideal." This is all very beautiful and plausible. But the main difficulty in this interpretation is, that in the succeeding sentence a literal woman is spoken of, and the subject does not seem to change. Indeed, when we remember how Solomon was almost ruined by his idolatrous wives, we might expect some allusion to them in this treatise. Here we have that allusion. And the internal evidences that this book was written by Solomon, together with the assertion that it was written by "the son of David, king in Jerusalem," (i. 1) are sufficient to show that Dr. Hengstenberg's "feeling for the allegorical element in Scripture is" quite too much "developed," when he endeavours to make it appear that the writer of this book was "*Solomo redivivus*" in the person of a Jew in the age of Malachi personifying wisdom. It might be expected of Solomon that he would here warn his hearers and readers, as he does in the Proverbs, against the strange woman's devices.

Thevenot says, "One method of ensnaring the traveller has been used in the East. A handsome woman, with dishevelled hair, meets him and implores his compassion; —he takes her up behind him, and hears her tale of woe;

when she throws a snare about his neck and strangles him, or stuns him till aided by a gang of robbers lying in wait." Persons more dangerous exist in no community than seducers, whether male or female. "Their hands are as bands." Their miserable victims are bound in chains of wretchedness and woe. Solomon, alas, had a sad experience of this evil,—the evil of seductive wives. In chapter 2d Solomon enumerates his sources of earthly enjoyment. And if he did not there mention his harem (though some think he did in ii. 8, where "musical instruments," &c., are translated "wife and wives;") we *now find it mentioned* with grief. As in those days a seraglio was supposed to add to the dignity of a king, Solomon was induced by this consideration to have his numerous wives and concubines. It was the custom of the times. It was the *fashion*. And his own heart inclined to follow it. His criminality may be thus, to *some* extent, accounted for and palliated. Read 1 Kings xi. 1–12; and Neh. xiii. 26.

"More bitter than death" is the woman who seduces. She sets snares with her heart. She holds her captives fast with her hands, as with a chain. "Whoso pleaseth God (literally, is good before God,) shall escape," as Joseph did.

27. *Behold, this have I found, (saith the Preacher,) counting one by one, to find out the account.*

The words, "saith the Preacher," are an ellipsis; supplied no doubt by the same person who prefixed the first two verses, and added the last seven. It is thrown in as the clause is in Num. xii. 3, where it is said, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Moses wrote the Book of Numbers, but his editor supplied that sentence. So Solomon's editor supplied "saith the Preacher."

"Counting one by one." The word counting is not in the original, though some verb must evidently be supplied. Let us supply *considering* or *thinking over*, or *reckoning*. This will remove the false impression that Solomon, in the midst of his discourse, went to counting either the absent or the present ones,—"to find out the computation." Solomon meant to tell us that he had made an *accurate* estimate —"one by one." And now for the result.

28. *Which my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.*

Solomon having taken an accurate survey of all his courtiers, companions, wives, and concubines: to see who of them were truly good and pious; came to this lamentable conclusion, that while there was one man in a thousand, there was not one woman in all those thousand wives and concubines:—not one really good woman *in all his seraglio!* He did not intend to bring an impeachment against the whole female sex. In the 31st chapter of Proverbs he describes the virtuous woman; and in many other passages he shows his appreciation of female excellency. (See Prov. xii. 4; xiv. 1; xviii. 22; xix. 14.)

In all Christian lands there are more pious women than men. But how could Solomon expect, in the circumstances, to find women that were truly good? He had himself been living far from God; and in this state of heart he went abroad,—among the heathen,—in search of wives. No wonder that the result was as stated! This was the result of Solomon's testing what was good, by *mirth*, by *pleasure*, (mirth from men—pleasure from women,) by *wine*, by *laying hold on folly:* ii. 1–3. But his investigations had brought him to one important discovery, as stated in the next verse.

29. *Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

No doubt this is spoken of God's having made Adam in a state of innocence; and of his having fallen with all his posterity. Man "has sought out many inventions" by which to sin,—by which to obtain happiness irrespective of God. These inventions have proved a complete failure. "There is no profit under the sun." We see the bearing that this passage has on the general subject. No invention of man can secure advantage without the fear of God.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *It is pleasing to contemplate man as he once was.* "God made man upright." He was the *crowning* work of creation. His creation is mentioned with *emphasis.* After all other things were created, there seems to have been a pause. Some new event of great importance was now to occur. The narrative assumes a graver tone. Listen! "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Man, thus made, has a higher destiny than the whole irrational universe. He was sent forth on a nobler mission. He will survive the burning up of the earth,—the blotting out of the sun,—and the rolling together of the heavens as a scroll. Man's *body* is fearfully and wonderfully made. It displays the most ingenious mechanism. But the powers of the mind are more wonderful than the

mechanism of the body. In his primeval state those powers had no bias to evil. God made man upright. Man's will was in unison with that of God. His thoughts, desires, and actions were pure. The first pair loved God supremely, and each other as bearing God's image. Sin was known to them only as a *possible* evil. Happiness was a necessary consequence. The seeds of disease had not been sown in the body. Every object was looked upon with pleasure, and labour was recreation. Paradise was their home; where God came on visits of love, and communed with his loving obedient children. It was man's golden age. Since then there has been but one pure man, and he trode sorrowfully our earth, for though innocent he bore our sins. It was the weeping, bleeding, dying Jesus.

II. *It is sad to contemplate man as he* NOW IS. The crown has fallen from his head! "He has sought out many inventions"—inventions that have wrought his ruin. Under the teaching of the great tempter he broke the covenant, and plunged himself into wretchedness and woe. Oh! how has the gold become dim! The germ of evil appears in every infant heart,—stubbornness, envy, spite, deceit. The germ matures (when not restrained) into treason and bloodshed, in riper age. Our world is one vast *aceldama—a field of blood*. Sin reigns supreme, enthroned on human hearts. So malignant is the evil, that when the very essence of virtue and goodness found its place on earth, it was hunted down and driven from the world. The Son of God, the embodiment of all excellence,—whose hands brought gifts of richest value, and whose heart was a gushing fountain of love,—was insulted, spit upon, scourged and crucified! Such is the enmity of the human heart. As a result of all this, there is misery and death on earth. The body is torn with darting, gnaw-

ing, insufferable pain; the soul with the scorpion-fangs of a guilty conscience. And then, there is eternal death! Who can describe the horrors of that dismal hell which awaits transgressors? "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

III. *It is joyful to contemplate redeemed men as they shall be.* While on earth they are but partially sanctified. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Ver. 20. But the hour of their release is at hand. It doth not yet appear what they shall be. It would take a seraph's tongue to describe the bliss in store. It will take more than seraph wings to reach it. It will take redeemed harps to sound the high praises of Him that has bought it with his blood. Tell us, ye spirits of the just made perfect, what was your rapture when ye first opened your eyes to the beauties spread out before you in Paradise. Tell us about the lovely face of Jesus, whom ye see as he is. Tell us of the uncreated glory of the Father, before whom angels veil their faces. How do ye spend your time amid the wonders of your blessed abode? Ah! could you visit us in our house of dust, you might not utter the unspeakable things which you see and enjoy. We will patiently wait then till Jesus shall himself come and receive our departing spirits, and bear them to his own bright abode—your sweet home. Then we shall know more of the height, and the depth, and the length, and the breadth; of his love, of his grace, of his glory. Then shall he feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. So let it be to the writer; so let it be to the reader. Hallelujah.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTENTS.

The truly wise discern the fit time to act, in view of the judgment; and therefore learn the importance of obeying rulers. 1–5. *Others are in constant misery in fearing the future, and especially in fearing death: and yet delay of judgment emboldens them in transgression.* 6–11. *This is all introductory to the following important truth, viz.: All will be made right at last, though in this life there seems to be injustice toward both the righteous and the wicked: and the most earnest search terminating on things "under the sun" fails to discover why God deals as he does.* 12–17.

Analysis. Verses 1-8.

VERSE 1. Heavenly wisdom changes the very countenance.

2–5. Rulers are to be obeyed; in view (1) of a higher Power to whom we appeal in oaths of allegiance: (2) in view of the control which they *can* exercise: (3) in view of the safety of obedience: (4) in view of the present suitable time and the future judgment.

6, 7. Man's misery is increased by his ignorance of what is best at the time, and of what the judgment will be:

8. And especially by his inability to escape the power of death.

EXPOSITION.

1. *Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.*

Solomon seems to speak of the man who is *truly* wise—pious. This appears from what follows. He knows the interpretation of a thing—of a word or treatise—of the Scriptures, (perhaps.) "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The wise man knoweth of the

doctrine, because he doeth the will of God. The babe in human knowledge, who drinks in the spirit of God's word, often has more correct views than "the wise and prudent" from whom the meaning is hidden.

"A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed." Moses' face shone miraculously, when he communed with God. Stephen's face was like that of an angel. When God's children commune with him, their very countenances betray it. And pious men lose the traces of dissipation, anger, hatred, and shame, which formerly appeared on their faces. The Lord *beautifies* the meek with salvation. Ps. cxlix. 4. Hope beams in the eye;—benevolence lights up the face with smiles. Bridges says of godliness, "If it be too humble to court the eye, it is too active to escape it."

By the "boldness of his face," we are to understand *fierceness*, as it is in the original. There is certainly a great and marked difference between the fierce countenance of a savage, and the benevolent face of a Christian. Religion mollifies the whole man. The Berleburger Bible, as quoted by Hengstenberg, says, "When, through the transforming power of wisdom, a heart of flesh has taken the place of the heart of stone, the inward pliancy and docility, the soul's fear of God and his commands, which then follow, become discernible in the *countenance*."

2. *I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.*

The oath of God means the oath of allegiance which subjects took, and which is implied as taken by every citizen of every country. The word "king" stands for any ruler—any one in lawful authority. Obedience is due to "the powers that be," and is inculcated by several considerations. (1.) By the oath taken by subjects. While

foreigners are generally required to take the oath of allegiance on becoming citizens, all native-born citizens are regarded as under a covenant to obey. Bridges says, "If there be no outward covenants, as in days of old, the solemn obligation still remains to those who stand to us in the place of God." If it does not, then foreigners are better citizens than natives, which would be absurd.

3. *Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.* 4. *Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?* 5. *Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.*

Be not impatient at the commands of the ruler, and therefore hasty to leave duty. And persist not in the wrong. To go out of the king's sight, is to avoid duty. In Esther i. 14, seven princes are spoken of, which saw the king's face, i. e., waited obediently before him. The angels "stand before God." They wait in obedient readiness. Jesus says of "these little ones," "their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." They stand before God, looking to catch the first intimation of his will, to see what commands he has for them concerning these little ones.

They wait to avenge the wrongs of these little ones; therefore despise them not. Be obedient, is expressed by—"go not out of his presence." "Stand not in an evil thing," i. e., persist not, if you have inadvertently or wilfully erred.

"For he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him." (2.) The second reason here given for obedience is, the ruler has power to enforce his commands. "He doeth whatsoever pleaseth him." The fourth verse is a repetition of the last part of the third, to make it emphatic.

In the fifth verse another reason is given for obedience. (3.) There is *safety* in obedience. "Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing." Also a fourth reason is given. (4.) A wise subject looks at present consequences and the future judgment. "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment." These same arguments for obedience to rulers are used by Paul. Rom. xiii. 1–7; Titus iii. 1. Also by Peter, 1 Pet. ii. 13–18. Such views as these must be inculcated and maintained under all administrations, and in all circumstances. But if rulers direct us to do what is contrary to God's word, we are to "obey God rather than man."

A wise man's heart discerneth the fit time—the right opportunity, and the final result of conduct—the judgment of God upon it, favourable or unfavourable. It may be that this passage refers to the rectifying of abuses in a government. If so, it means, the wise man knows *when* to seek to rectify them; and thinks of the responsibility—the judgment of God upon his conduct. If there are abuses in the government or country, the wise man will seek the *proper time* of undertaking the office of a reformer, and the proper method; looking to the judgment of God (and of posterity.)

6. *Because to every purpose there is time and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him.*

Because to every business (of man) there is a proper time, or a limited period, disregard to which causes failure; and this is followed by the judgment; therefore the misery of man is increased upon him. "It is appointed to all men once to die, and after that the judgment." Man is in misery, because his opportunities are misimproved, and the judgment follows. "If thou hadst known, even thou; at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy

peace!—but now they are hid from thine eyes." Luke xix. 42. The verses which follow confirm this interpretation.

7. *For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be?*

Man being ignorant of the future, knows not when the evil day may come. He knows not that an opportunity like the present may ever return; and no one can tell him.

8. *There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit: neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.*

No man hath power to keep his spirit from leaving the body when the hour of death arrives. "There is an appointed time to man upon the earth." The spirit *must* then go to God.

The soldier sometimes gets a discharge, and escapes the conflict. But in the war with death there is *no* discharge. The battle must be fought. Wickedness shall not deliver its lord. But there is One who can give victory. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *If earthly rulers are to be obeyed, in view of their power and our safety; how much more is our heavenly Ruler to be obeyed for the same reasons!*

All things are under the control of *law*. For *matter* there are what we call *the laws of nature*. So uniform are they that it is considered miraculous when they are suspended. Some of these laws are still hidden, notwithstanding the onward rapid march of science. But could we enter into the secret springs of all motion and life, we

should discover that *all* are *under law*—God working out his own mysterious purposes.

For rational and intelligent beings there are other laws of vast moment. There are moral, mental, civil, and ecclesiastical laws;—some directly from God,—others through the agency of his creatures.

What laws there may be for angels, it is not necessary for us to know. But they too are under government, and will be judged. God is the author of civil government, and we should be obedient because he is. "The powers that be are ordained of God, wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." It will be a heaven on earth when every child is dutiful,—every citizen obedient,—every inferior respectful; and all in authority just and good like their heavenly Ruler. On the other hand nothing is worse than anarchy!—Ambitious men plotting and overturning their government;—no control in the state, in the church, in the family;—every man's life insecure, because there is no law. The heart sickens at the contemplation.

Obedience to God is more essential still, in view of his authority and our safety. "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy." James iv. 12. God made known his law on mount Sinai amid thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and fire, and darkness! And if God was so terrible in *giving* his law, what will he be in judging us for transgressing it? *Then* the people were terrified with the voices, and smoke, and sounding of the trumpet. But what will be the consternation of that day "when the Lord shall descend from heaven, *with a shout*, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God!" Not mount Sinai only, but the world shall be in flames. The heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll. God's voice shall be heard calling, "*Awake, ye dead, and*

come to judgment!" Countless millions will stand before the great Judge, not to receive a law, but to hear a *sentence*. Then the sorrows of the disobedient will begin, not to end! But this Lawgiver is "able to save!" "Bless the Lord, O my soul," for salvation! He "is able to save to the uttermost!" He is *willing!* Now he waits to be gracious. In the confidence of faith let us commit all, now, and for ever, into those hands that fashioned the heavens; and into that heart that beats with unchangeable love.

II. *Death is an enemy that we must all encounter; and either conquer or be conquered by him.* "There is no discharge in that war." The soldier goes forth to do battle for his country. With strong arm and brave heart, he is prepared to execute the will of his commander. But he may never be brought into the mortal strife. He may be discharged ere he hear the trumpet calling him to the fray. Peace may be proclaimed ere he have a chance to show his prowess. Not so in this dread encounter with death. Face to face we must all stand before this hideous foe, and feel his cold steel penetrating our vitals. We shrink back; it may be we ask to be discharged. But the conflict must come sooner or later. If we get a furlough, it is but for a season, when we must return and meet the foe. No age nor condition is exempt. Friends cannot rescue us;—physicians cannot. The rich and the powerful must come to the encounter, as well as the poor and helpless. Wardlaw says, "The power that sways millions with a nod, fails here. The wealth that procures for its owner all that his heart can wish, fails here. The might of the warrior, which has slain his thousands, and which no human arm could withstand, fails here. The most earnest desire of life, and the tears, and the wailings, and the fond caresses

of disconsolate affection—all fail here." Of all the hundreds of millions that have lived before us, only two were ever discharged. Enoch and Elijah were spared the encounter, by an honourable discharge. Jesus alone had power to waive the conflict; and he would not. He was the true volunteer. "No man," he said, "taketh my life from me;—but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down; and I have power to take it again." John x. 18. Others are like *drafted* soldiers—they are not generally volunteers. They enter the conflict because they *must* enter it. And yet by divine grace multitudes enter it cheerfully—joyfully.

In this battle we must conquer or be conquered. If we fight the battle alone, unaided by our glorious Leader, we shall be utterly conquered. *Sin* will sting and pierce our souls with mortal power. "The sting of death is sin." The law will clamour for justice. Conscience will lash the soul with scorpion terror. Vengeance will destroy. We must have help, or we are undone. But if the Captain of our salvation lead us, we shall rejoice in a glorious victory. We shall shout, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ." Stephen thus conquered when the rough stones were mangling his flesh and breaking his bones. With a face radiant with glory, like the face of an angel, he gazed into the very heaven of heavens, and "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing" to receive him. And his prayer was, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Polycarp prayed, or rather praised, as his persecutors were about to light the fire to consume his body; "I praise thee that thou hast judged me worthy of this day and hour, to take part in the number of thy witnesses, in the cup of Christ." Jerome, of Prague, sang hymns in

going to the place of execution; and asked that the fire might be kindled before his eyes rather than behind him. The last words that he sang, as the fire consumed his body, were:

"This soul in flames, I offer, Christ, to thee!"

Lawrence Saunders embraced and kissed the stake, saying, "Welcome the cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life." And thousands as brave as they have fought the good fight, and laid hold on eternal life. Lord, give us grace to suffer, and then give us glory! Amen.

Analysis. Ver. 9-17.

VERSES 9, 10. Solomon had seen that power and position are not the things that can profit. Their possessors are often injured by them while they live; nor do they prevent their being forgotten when they die.

11-13. Though men may take occasion to sin, because God's judgments delay, yet final awards will be meted out to men according to their characters.

14, 15. The present unequal awards (if there is no future,) indicate that the main business of life should be to take enjoyment in gratifying the appetites.

16, 17. The most earnest search of the wisest men, to find out divine things by earthly, (though causing loss of sleep day and night,) fails to accomplish the object.

EXPOSITION.

Solomon continues to teach a future state of rewards and punishments.

Archbishop Whately* and others argue that the doctrine of immortality is not taught in the Old Testament. But this is one among the many striking evidences of the blindness of men. Certainly the doctrine of immortality

* Lectures on a Future State; published A. D. 1855.

is taught in almost every book of the Bible. Did Moses live and die without a hope of heaven? When God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham," did not Moses understand it as Jesus did, that Abraham was then living?—that God asserted that he was the God of a *living* man? Had David no faith in a future life when he said, "Thou shalt lead me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory?" Did not Job know that in his flesh (after worms should devour his body) he should see God? So in these verses a future state is kept in view.

9. *All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt.*

In pursuing his investigations of life's advantages, Solomon looked at it in all its aspects. He would naturally ask if there were any advantage in power and authority. Here he tells us the result of his inquiry. The ruler often ruled "to his *own hurt*." And indeed nothing is more common. Even *good* rulers often have so great an amount of care and perplexity, that life becomes a burden, and the heart is crushed. Authority is good only as a means of usefulness. But if there is no future state, better would it be to spare one's self the trouble and perplexity. Bad rulers, however, are especially intended.

10. *And I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.*

This verse may refer to wicked rulers, who had departed this life. Not only was there no profit to them in life, but there was no advantage afterward. They were buried as others, buried after being in honour—in the place of the holy; nay, *forgotten* as unworthy of a place in the affections of the living. There is a climax here:

first, in the place of honour—then dead—buried—forgotten!

The "place of the holy" is the court, senate, or sanctuary. All these should be considered holy places. There may here be an allusion to iii. 16, where wickedness was in the place of judgment, and iniquity in the place of righteousness. Alas, too often has the senate decreed wickedness, and the bench pronounced unrighteously. But those who have so done have gone from the place of the holy, and perished in name—in estate—in person. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found." Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36.

11. *Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

God is long-suffering, and the sentence against wicked men is therefore delayed. This *should* lead the wicked to repentance. But it often produces the contrary effect, and men mock and say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." 2 Pet. iii. 4. They consider delays as failures.

Some wicked men have repented, being overcome by God's goodness; but multitudes have taken advantage thereby to sin. Their hearts are "fully set in them to do evil." But the execution of the sentence *will* come sooner or later. It may come "with the feet of wool (softly); but it will strike with the hands of lead." Alas for the victim when his time cometh! The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah; but when the time came, the sentence was executed most fearfully. Bishop

Taylor says, as quoted by Bridges: "Vice first is pleasing; then it grows easy; then delightful; then frequent; then habitual; then confirmed; then the man is impenitent; then obstinate; then he resolves never to repent; and then *he is damned.*"

This verse refers especially to rulers, but is a general proposition including all men. The Hebrew word פתגם (*pithegam*) translated *sentence*, is one of the words relied upon to prove that this book was written after the days of Solomon, because a "later Hebrew" word or Chaldaic. But Gesenius says that the word "would seem to come from an antique form, in which both the *t* and *g* were preserved." Persian—*peighâm.* Some of Solomon's auditors may have been from foreign countries, and familiar with the word. Because it is not found in any book of the Bible before Solomon's time, it is no evidence that it was not known *in his time.* In Esther i. 20, it is translated *decree.* It was a word used by Memucan, a Persian, and was probably an Eastern word of ancient date. "Chaldaic words occur in the book of Job, the Proverbs, &c." (Horne, Vol. ii. p. 32.) These books of the Old Testament are as old as Solomon's time, certainly.

12. *Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:*

13. *But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.*

Here is a striking contrast between the sinner and those that fear God. The sinner, though he should live long enough to greatly multiply his iniquities, shall not find it well with him. Yet surely it shall be well with the righteous. Solomon *knew* that it would, he says. He here seems evidently to refer to the future state. It shall be

well with the righteous hereafter: not so with the wicked. Stuart says that the repetition of the idea of fearing God,—(Ver. 12) "them that fear God, which fear before him,"—denotes "*continual, habitual* action. The repetition, then, must be for the sake of intensity. Both phrases—*those who truly and habitually fear God.*" Stuart's remarks on this passage are so good that they should not be omitted. He gives a kind of paraphrase, thus: "Whatever advantage oppressors may gain, and however great the evils which they occasion, it remains true after all, and it is a consolation for the oppressed, that those who fear God shall sooner or later obtain their reward." He then adds: "In *this* world? The tenor of the book is plainly against this." * * * * * * "That it is in *another* world, then, seems to be the necessary implication."

The 13th verse should probably be divided to read thus: "—neither shall he prolong his days. He is as a shadow because he feareth not before God." The wicked are like a varying cloud, a fleeting shadow. These verses teach a righteous retribution. "At the great day, there will be a clear discernment between the righteous and the wicked—between him that *feareth*, and him that *feareth not*—before God. (Mal. iii. 18.")*

These verses tell of a future retribution as it *shall be*. The next verse returns to the subject as seen in the light of *this world*, irrespective of another.

14. *There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.*

This vanity is done *upon earth*, (not in another world,)

*Bridges.

that to just men it happens according to the work of the wicked, and to wicked men it happeneth according to the work of the righteous. We see the same thing every day. By the good and evil which men receive in this life, we must either suppose that all is chance without any Ruler, or that God cares nothing for virtue or vice. This verse corresponds exactly in sentiment with vii. 15, where a just man perishes in his righteousness, and a wicked man prolongs his life in his wickedness. But it is a view which Solomon takes from the stand-point of this world. It is a surface view of the matter. It is looking upon life as though there were no future. It is a return to the text, "What advantage has life without another life?" But the end is not yet. It will appear hereafter that all things have worked together for good to the righteous.

15. *Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.*

If this world is all that a man has, the main good with him is enjoyment. Mirth, eating, drinking,—these constitute his sum of happiness. But remember, it is "under the sun,"—for this life,—"the days of his life."

16. ¶ *When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:)*

17. *Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it: yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.*

These verses show the utter inability of man to understand Divine dispensations. Study so intense as to cause sleepless nights, cannot solve the riddle of existence.

Without a revelation, through what inextricable mazes does the mind wander! But adored be the name of God for his blessed word. Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel!

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

1. *The crown of glory is the only crown worthy of our ambition.* Earthly crowns are often filled with thorns. "One man ruleth over another to his own hurt." The sword of power has often been plunged into the heart of him that bore it. Especially have usurpers often met with a violent death. And oppressors have been made examples of God's displeasure. Read the books of Kings and Chronicles:—how many of the kings of Israel and Judah mounted the throne to suffer and be disgraced. Saul died in battle. Ishbosheth was assassinated. The good David was tried with three or four rebellions, and one of them got up by his own petted and beautiful son. Nadab was slain by Baasha. Baasha's son Elah was murdered by Zimri. Zimri was dethroned and perished miserably. Ahab, the murderer and oppressor, was slain in battle; and the dogs licked up his blood where he had caused Naboth to be slain. Jehoram was slain by Jehu. Jehoash, after great calamities, was slain by his servants. Amaziah of Judah was slain by conspirators. Zechariah was murdered by Shallum. Shallum was murdered in turn. Pekahiah was murdered by his captain Pekah. Pekah by Hoshea. Hoshea was made a captive by Shalmanezer of Assyria. Manasseh was carried captive to Babylon. Amon, his son, was slain by his own servants. The good Josiah, going to war against Pharaoh Necho, was slain. Jehoiachin was slain. Zedekiah's sons were slain before his eyes, his eyes put out, and he carried captive to Babylon.

The royal line of the Stuarts is among the most unfortunate in the records of history. Their destiny followed them through the long period of nearly 400 years.

Robert III., king of Scotland, died of a broken heart, occasioned by his oldest son, Robert, having been starved to death, and his youngest son James being made a prisoner.

James I. his son, was taken prisoner by the English, and remained in confinement eighteen years. On his return to Scotland, after having beheaded three of his nearest kindred, he was himself assassinated by his own relations as a punishment.

James II. was killed by a cannon shot at the siege of Roxbury.

James III. succeeded his father, James II. He put to death his brother John, and would have destroyed his other brother Alexander, but he escaped, and levied war against him. James was defeated in battle, and having fallen from his horse, took refuge in a mill, where he was discovered and put to death.

James IV. was slain in the battle of Flodden field.

James V. died of grief for the loss of his army at Solway Moss. He left his dominions to his only daughter, Mary Stuart (better known as the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots,) who, after suffering eighteen years of imprisonment, was beheaded at Fotheringay Castle, Northamptonshire, on the 8th of February, 1587.

Henry Stuart, Earl of Darnley, the husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, died the victim of revenge. His house in Edinburgh was blown up in the night by gunpowder, and the unfortunate monarch's body was found next day in a field adjoining. It may be added, that Charles I. was also beheaded; and finally his son, James II., expelled, and with him the direct line of the Stuarts was driven from

the throne of Britain. The last of the direct line died a cardinal in Rome under the title of "Cardinal York."

The Bourbon royal family has fared but little better. It was once one of the most powerful and distinguished families in Europe. The descendants of the proud and magnificent Louis XIV. have had little else than exile and sorrow. Well may kings abdicate their thrones rather than venture the danger of royalty. And well may subjects be satisfied with their obscurity.

But there are thrones which shall never be abdicated. "I saw thrones (Rev. xx. 4.) and they sat upon them." "To him that overcometh," says Jesus, "will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. iii. 21. Yes there will be a *crown* also for conquerors; a crown of joy, a crown of glory, a crown of life. Paul knew that there was laid up for him "a crown of righteousness." Peter tells of "a crown of glory that fadeth not away," given by the chief Shepherd. Jesus promises "a crown of life" to those that are "faithful unto death." That crown will not subject the wearer to danger. May I be thus crowned. May every reader reign as a king in heaven; and cast his crown at the feet of Jesus, saying, "Thou art worthy!"

"Palms of glory, raiments bright,
Crowns that never fade away,
Gird and deck the saints in light,
Priests, and kings, and conquerors they.

"Yet the conquerors bring their palms
To the Lamb amidst the throne;
And proclaim in joyful psalms,
Victory through his cross alone.

"Kings their crowns for harps resign,
Crying as they strike the chords,
Take the kingdom, it is thine,
King of kings and Lord of lords."

II. *The contrast between the prospects of the righteous and wicked is striking.* "It shall be well with the righteous;—it shall not be well with the wicked." However mysterious God's providence towards his people now, they will be able at last to say with the stricken mother who went to the prophet on the death of her darling boy;—"It is well." While it is true that "the heart knoweth his own bitterness," the heart of the righteous has joys that the stranger intermeddleth not with. The storm may rage,—the angry heavens may seem about to pour their deluge of wrath upon his head:—he sits serene beneath the tempest; and awaits the time when its fury shall be spent, and the rainbow shall tell that sun-beams have returned, and that the earth is refreshed by what seemed a visit of wrath. And when the last storm has spent itself, and the shadows have fled away for ever,—then those that fear God shall enjoy the fulness of his love, and find what is now wrought out for them in tears and conflicts, to be "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Not so the wicked! Those hearts that now know their own bitterness will see that the dregs of the cup which they now sip lightly are far more bitter. The raging storm that now appals them, will summon all its terrors and sweep them away into "the blackness of darkness for ever." "There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth, when they shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of heaven, and they themselves thrust out."

If, like David, we begin to repine at seeing the present prosperity of the wicked, and the present afflictions of the righteous; let us follow them, as he did, into the sanctuary. There we shall learn their end! There we shall see them standing on slippery places over the yawning gulf about to receive them!

Let us not yet turn our eyes from the image of the righteous now passed over Jordan, and fairly in the blessed city above. Happy in themselves and in God, the joys of the saved will increase by the arrival of other redeemed ones to share their bliss, till vast myriads shall crowd around the throne. Oh, it will be *well* to exchange the society of our best beloved on earth, (for they are imperfect,) for the fellowship of all holy intelligences. It will be *well* to dwell with our blessed Redeemer, where there "shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor sighing." Oh, it will be well to rest for ever from labours, and toils, and passions, and sins, and be spotless as the adoring cherub, and earnest as the burning seraph!

III. *Delays are not reprieves.* The sentence may *delay* to be executed, but it will not on that account *fail* to be executed. Let not the sinner therefore begin to say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" He delays, but it is in long-suffering mercy;—it is because he delighteth not in the death of sinners. He is slow to anger, and he waits to be gracious. But the longest day of mercy must have a close, and the sinner spared from day to day will be obliged at length to face the judgment. The day of grace may close suddenly. God may say, "Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." Prov. i. 24–27. The only refuge from the coming storm is the shelter provided by infinite love. Jesus is the hiding-place from the tempest. Careless sinner, you cannot take refuge in his love too soon!

CHAPTER IX.

CONTENTS.

This chapter is an expansion of the latter part of the eighth, especially of verse 14th. It teaches that from the occurrences around us and God's dealings with us, we cannot come to any certain judgment about his love for us or hatred toward us. And yet that the present life is the time and the only time to secure future good, and therefore we ought to be diligent. The wisdom of this world may be profitable to others, and yet the man who has it may reap no earthly advantage. (*And therefore the wise man has little or no advantage over a fool*, ii. 15, 16.)

Analysis. Verses 1-10.

VERSES 1–3. Solomon had found this, and now declares it, that the righteous are safe, happen what will; though from outward things it could not be found out whether God loved or hated any particular persons. He then gives emphatic testimony to the corruption of the human heart during life.

4–6. In view of his probation the meanest *living* man has the advantage of the most distinguished that has died.

7–10. Therefore we should make the best of life while life lasts.

EXPOSITION.

1. *For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them.*

Solomon's researches ended where *ours* must, viz.: in this great truth, that God sits at the helm; and that his people—"the righteous, and the wise, and their works"—are protected and controlled by him. They are in his hand. It is a great consolation to God's people that their persons are under his care, and their good works are the result of his grace. Though they cannot ascertain by

God's *outward* dealings with them whether he loves or hates them, they are safe. This verse is intimately connected with the preceding chapter, (vs. 14–17.) and gives the reason why the righteous and wicked share alike in this world. All is in the hand of God,—at his disposal. "By all that is before them," men cannot determine the love or hatred of God toward them. That it means God's love or hatred is plain from the subject. Indeed the same words are used elsewhere and applied to God's approbation and disapprobation. The best of men sometimes meet with great calamities, and wicked men often prosper in this life. Therefore men cannot determine "by all that is before them," by the things which they witness, whether God is their friend or enemy. Hitzig says on this verse, "Inasmuch as man has not his acts in his own power, he does not know whether he will love or hate." But J. D. Michaelis gives a far more consistent interpretation, thus: "In this world we cannot tell by the events of life whether God loves us or hates us, because to the righteous it happens as to the unrighteous: nor can we even know whether God means to show us love by sending prosperity, or hatred by sending adversity." We ought therefore to walk by faith, trusting the hand of God; not by sight, (as yet,) trusting to outward appearances. The "*works*" of the righteous are also in the hand of God. God "worketh in them to will and to do."

Prof. Stuart makes the words "before them" refer to the future. He explains it thus: "No man can tell whether good or ill fortune is to betide him, because he cannot know the future." But this is an unusual if not an unknown meaning of the Hebrew word לִפְנֵי (*lapini*) rendered *before*. The obvious meaning is the same as in the first commandment,—"before me,"—in my presence.

The words "before them" seem here to be equivalent to the oft repeated expression, "under the sun." Things before us,—under the sun,—are the things of *this life*.

2. *All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.*

So far as this life is concerned, and so far as we can see, there is one event to all. This verse confirms the interpretation given to the preceding. By "him that sweareth" we are no doubt to understand him that sweareth profanely. Otherwise there would be no contrast, as between "the righteous and wicked; the clean and unclean." Profane swearing is not a modern invention. It was a vice of ancient time. In 2 Samuel xix. 7, we have a specimen of profane language, in character with the man who uttered it. When Jesus says, "Swear not at all," he evidently refers to profane swearing. The evil is mentioned in Lev. v. 1; Jer. xxiii. 10; Hosea iv. 2; Zech. v. 3, 4.

3. *This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*

Taking a view of this world by itself, it is an evil that there is one event, (lot, destiny,) to all;—to the good and the evil. And also (גם) it is an evil that the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, &c. It seems hard that the wicked should share like the good; and it is sad to consider that unrenewed hearts are full of evil; that they are mad while they live; and that they then go to the dead.

Solomon probably had reference to the hearts of *wicked* men; though evil is in all hearts, and none feel it more sadly than the righteous. They cry with Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" Sin is a kind of madness and folly, preferring death to life, misery to joy.

"After that they go to the dead." Some suppose this means *eternal death*. But it would seem from the original to mean simply to where the dead are. The original is elliptical and impressive. "Madness is in their heart while they live, and after that—*to the dead!*" The object of the writer seems to be to bring out the fact that, if men are wicked while they live, they go where they will have no opportunity to secure pardon. This truth is brought out fully in the following verses, 4–6, 10.

4. ¶ *For to him that is joined to all the living, there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*

This verse seems to conflict with iv. 2, 3, where it is said, "I praised the dead more than the living," &c. But in that passage the writer was contemplating the grave as the final end of the miseries of life, on the supposition of there being no hereafter. In this verse (4) he views this life in connection with its *real* consequences, as bearing upon the future. "There is hope" while life lasts;—hope of amendment, hope of preparation, hope of heaven. "A living dog is better than a dead lion," seems to be a proverb, which Solomon made for the occasion, or which was then familiar to his hearers.

There is the same proverb in the Arabic, but it may have been taken from this. In the east, no animal is considered more contemptible than a dog. "Is thy servant a dog?" A lion, on the other hand, was always considered a noble animal. The meanest *living* man has space for seeking eternal life—the noblest dead man has no further probation.

The word "for," with which this verse begins, is sometimes translated *truly*. This seems to be its meaning here. *Truly* there is hope to him that is joined to all the living.

5. *For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.*

The word "for" here also may be translated *albeit* or *although*. It cannot point out a reason. It is no sufficient reason that a living man is better than a dead one, that the former knows he is to die; unless we add another, that he knows also that now is the time to prepare for death and eternity. This *may be* the idea. But it seems to say, while the living man has hope, he knows that he is to die: yet "the dead know not any thing." "Neither have they any more a reward." All this language has reference to the knowledge of this life and the reward of this life. Or it may mean, that on the supposition of there being no hereafter, the dead are as though they had never been. However the next verse seems to justify the first sense:—"Neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." It does not say that they have no portion in another state.

6. *Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.*

Their earthly passions are extinct. They have done with earth. "What profit have they, if this is the only life?" But it is well with the righteous after death. See comments on viii. 12. The phrase "under the sun," as usual, restricts the meaning to this life. So far as this life is concerned, the dead have no love, no hatred, no envy.

All have perished with their earthly estate—portion. And if there is no other world, all is ended for ever.

7. ¶ *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.*

Solomon now addresses the righteous and the wise. Let such go their way, walk in wisdom; and partake of the bounties of Providence joyfully, for they are accepted. "*Drink thy wine—?*" Unfermented wine is a wholesome beverage; wholly unlike that which "moveth itself aright." Prov. xxiii. 31. Against that we are warned—"it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." "*For God now accepteth thy works*"—the works of the righteous. These are in his hands, ver. 1. God accepteth our works only through the righteousness of Christ, as taught elsewhere and often.

8. *Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.*

White garments and ointment express joy and purity. "Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." Rev. iii. 4, 5. The "fine linen, clean and white," in which the Lamb's bride is arrayed, "is the righteousness of saints." Rev. xix. 8. The direction in this verse seems to amount to this, *Be joyful and upright in using God's gifts.*

9. *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.*

Enjoy domestic comfort. The original has it, enjoy life with the wife that thou lovest. There is nothing here rec-

ommended but what is consistent with a most pure and upright life. Celibacy is certainly not a holier state than matrimony. The Roman priesthood have not been famous for their pure lives! Marriage is one of God's earliest ordinances, and it "is honourable in all." Alas, Solomon had little experience of the value of domestic life; at least after he multiplied wives to himself. But by inspiration he advised that which was right. *All the days of the life of thy vanity*, are the days "under the sun," and the "portion in this life." In the future state there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage.

10. *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.*

As the writer was addressing the righteous in the preceding verses, he continues to address the same class in this, and exhorts them to do their work earnestly, as they had but little time for labour, there being no work in the grave. This life is the time to labour for God and for eternal life. The word *grave*, is in the Hebrew, *sheol*. It is the place of the dead. If it mean in this place anything more than the grave literally, then the passage teaches that there is "no work" by which to secure a reward;—"no device" by which to escape punishment;—"no knowledge" by which to change one's condition;—"no wisdom" by which to search out a way of security. But it is literally true that *in the grave* there is no work nor purpose. The passage disproves a purgatory. At death the state of the soul is fixed, as it is said (xi. 3) "in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."

Neologists point to this chapter, and exult in the idea that the writer did not believe in a future state. Professor Stuart, to meet their objections and satisfy his own mind

about this and several other passages, considers that an objector is represented as speaking. He says, "Must not language like this come from a worldling who indulges gloomy reveries, and doubts of any future existence? What Christian can speak so now? I must believe, then, that Koheleth (the Preacher) has given us here some of the most violent cases of doubt which once passed through his own mind, or else was suggested to him by some objector. Only a dissatisfied, doubting, gloomy mind engenders and broods over such conceptions as these." But if we take into view the Preacher's object, viz., to show that life has no substantial advantage without another life, and that therefore there is another life; Professor Stuart's difficulties are met, and the Neologist's views are confounded.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *The righteous and their works are in the hand of God.* The child in danger clings to the hand of its parent, and feels safe. It is a consolation to be told that the angels shall bear up in their hands the people of God when ready otherwise to dash their foot against a stone. Ps. xci. 12. To have a glorious guardian angel defending us from the many dangers of our pilgrimage is truly consoling. But how much more refreshing the thought, to know that that loving and almighty hand that bears up the pillars of the earth, and sustains the universe, is grasping with warm embrace every one of God's children. When enemies, like ravenous wolves, gnash their teeth in rage against God's people, it is consoling that they shall not be able to pluck them out of the hands of Christ or his Father.

When the storm is abroad,—when all nature is convulsed; God says to the warring elements, "be still." Or if he let them rage, he says, touch not my chosen ones.

Perhaps the reader has an absent friend, for whose safety great solicitude is felt. His thoughts are on that friend by day; and in the darkness of the night prayer is going up for his safety and welfare. That absent one is in the hand of One that can ward off danger. Or if he allow that friend to be assailed and smitten, he will reach forth his hand and take him to himself.

But all are in the hands of God as his instruments to do his will, to accomplish his work. As a man takes his axe or scythe to clear his ground or cut down his meadows, so God takes his people and makes them his instruments. Even the wicked are his axe and saw to do his work. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger," says God. Isa. x. 5.

> "They are the sword,—the hand is thine."

They are in his hand as an *ornament*. Christ says to his church, "Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." The wicked have reason to tremble that they are in the hand of God. There is *no escape* from it.

Let us suppose that God's hand *could* become weak! The church would be uncertain about ever gaining a victory over the world. Pilgrims to the promised land might miss their way. The sun would go zigzag along the heavens, and give but a sickly light. The pure angels might begin to tremble for their continued safety and glory. And could that hand be palsied, universal death and chaos would take the place of life and order and beauty and joy! Ah, that hand cannot grow feeble! And what I have committed to it shall never be lost!

> "Blessed be that hand;—whether it shed
> Mercies or judgments on my head,
> Extend the sceptre or exalt the rod,—
> Blessed be that hand!—it is the hand of God."

II. *God loves his people, though their outward condition may not indicate it.*

"No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them." God maketh his sun to rise on the evil as well as the good, and he sendeth rain on the unjust as well as the just. There are rich men among the good and among the evil; and poverty embraces with its skeleton arms the most devout Christian as well as the profane blasphemer. Abraham and Haman were rich:—Lazarus was as destitute as any intemperate spendthrift. But Lazarus left his wretchedness behind him when on angels' wings he mounted up to Abraham's bosom. If the "rich man" would not take him into his house, Abraham would take him to his bosom. How then are we to ascertain God's love to us? Not by his outward gifts; but by the love of our own hearts going forth to him, in prayer, in praise, in love. If with penitent Peter we can say, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;" we may know that we are the objects of his love. Love is reciprocal. "He first loved us," and his love drew us to his arms. Then we looked up and called him *Father*. And we shall soon know that God has loved us with an everlasting love.

Ye desponding disciples, though dark clouds overshadow you now, though tempted and sinning, you shall know that you are forgiven and saved, for the glory of heaven will greet you. By all that shall *then* be "before" you—by the angels of light—by the spirits of just men made perfect—by the harps and songs—by the mansions of rest,—by all these you shall know that God is your present friend. By the unfoldings of your Saviour's glory, and his approving smiles, you shall know that he has so loved you as to purchase that sweet Paradise with his own blood, and to fit it up for your reception, and then to go and take you to himself, that where he is you may be for ever.

III. *The human heart is mad.* It is not the madness of an injured brain, but of depravity. It is a *responsible* derangement. It is evident that *sin* is madness. Is it not insanity to reject a Friend and prefer an enemy? Is it not madness to rush forward into danger, when the good and wise are calling us to safety and to happiness? We feel sad when we behold the maniac—leaving his comfortable home to roam at large in chase of some phantom of the imagination—divesting himself of necessary raiment—refusing food—perhaps seeking to destroy his own life! The comforts that he rejects; and the follies in which he rejoices with insane merriment, declare too plainly that reason is dethroned. So when an immortal soul forsakes his heavenly Father's presence—despising the home provided—and chases the vain things of earth (so soon to perish) as his portion—refusing the robe of righteousness and the bread which came down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall live for ever—and rushing headlong to the second death,—it is a sad, *sad* spectacle. When he makes a jest of death and judgment, it seems to fall on the heart with more intense sadness than the wild jest of the poor lunatic. But is it insane to be devout? "I am not mad, most noble Festus," said the devout and earnest apostle; "but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." Let the ungodly know that to barter their glorious birth-right for a mess of pottage—to sell eternal life for the world—is intense lunacy!

IV. *Life's work must be done in life's time.* "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." Every life should be an *earnest* life. The *great end* of life cannot be attained without labour. To sit like a bronze statue on a column,

under pretext of sanctity; or to lie dormant and solitary in a cave, as a model of devotion; is to arraign the wisdom and the goodness of God, who has made our active limbs and throbbing hearts to throb and act for him. Before the whole family of man, God has spread out a field of wonderful promise. And he that labours for God shall not go unrewarded. He sins against his God, against himself, and against his species, who does not employ his energies to some important end. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise." But what do our hands find to do? As individuals, we have each to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, looking to God to work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. He that does not personally seek his salvation has forgotten his errand into life. He loses his soul!

Reader, were your lawyer so to neglect your interests entrusted to him as an attorney, as to cause the loss of your earthly estate; were your physician to trifle with your disease, till your life was becoming a prey to his neglect; or were your minister, your spiritual guide, to be unfaithful, so that by his disregard you should miss your way to heaven;—your accusations would justly be loud and earnest. But *your own souls*, committed to *yourselves* as they can be committed to no others; to be saved by your care, or lost by your neglect; valued above all price;—you trifle with, neglect, destroy! *All* are not guilty of such melancholy heedlessness; but many are. They do not attend to life's work in life's time.

But there are other interests pressing upon us. "Go work in my vineyard," says the great Husbandman. We must do for our families and for our race all that can be done; *now*,—*during this life*. At the close of life probation ends. Compared with eternity, with God's life, how brief is the whole of time, from Adam to his last son!

"To Him all time, with its long rolling years,
Burdened with human hopes and human fears,
Though to our eyes a stream of ceaseless flow,
Is but a drop in his eternal *now*;—
A grain of sand upon the ocean's shore;—
A moment's interlude amid that ocean's roar."

W. J. Young.

V. *Conjugal life should be a happy life.* "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity." There are many unhappy marriages; but it is not the fault of the institution, but of the heart. Marriage should always be the offspring of affection and virtue. When it is, social life is sweet and joyous. In families virtuous affections are planted that grow and live for ever. Here they bring forth their first fruits of social enjoyment.

These affections expand gradually, and lead to patriotism and philanthropy, and the world is blessed with deeds of kindness. In the family, industry and economy move hand in hand. Here education receives its first impulse. Parents only love their children so well as to take great pains in securing for them a good education. Collections of families support schools and colleges. The state takes an interest in education, because it would consult the desires and longings of parental hearts. The family is especially the foundation of *religious* instruction. Who would obtain the highest advantages of religious knowledge and hope, did not a mother's lips and a father's counsels impart the first principles? Civil government, too, would become a prey to anarchy and tumult, did not the sweet influences of home first bind the heart to filial obedience? Let the married, the parents, the children, be aware of their high vantage ground for happiness and virtue.

Analysis. Verses 11-18.

Solomon is still inquiring, what advantage has this life without another? This will help us to analyze and explain these verses.

VERSES 11-12. Temporary advantages do not always prove a gain, and promised good often leads into a snare.

13-18. Individual influence is great in its results, but the principal benefit is often to others, and not to the person exerting it; and the injury done by one sinner is great.

EXPOSITION.

11. ¶ *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.*

This verse is not in opposition to verse tenth. That is designed to stimulate the sluggish;—this to curb the too sanguine, and cause them to look beyond the mere instrument, to God for success. The racer may stumble, for "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." The fortunes of war may take an unexpected turn, for "the Lord can save by many or by few." The best laid plans for securing wealth may fail, for "riches take to themselves wings." And the gifted may be (as we term it) the most unfortunate of men. Asahel was swift, but felt the steel of Abner. Goliath was strong, but the stripling boy felled him. Ahithophel was wise, but Hushai supplanted him, and he died as a fool.

"Time and chance happeneth to all." In the usual acceptation of the word, there is *no* "chance." Every thing is ordered of God, from the death of an insect to the submerging of a world. There are critical moments in every one's history; and what seems casual to us is in the hand of God, (ver. 1) ordered by Providence. The bow drawn at a venture, sped its way as God would have it to the joints of Ahab's harness. If king Ahasuerus

chanced to be wakeful, as we say, God ordered his sleeplessness, that the train might be laid for saving the Jews from being slaughtered by their enemies. In spiritual things, the race is to him that runs in God's strength. The battle is to him that fights under the panoply of Heaven. Riches above all price are to him that is poor in spirit. And the favour of God is to the humble and prayerful.

12. *For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*

Poor man is often entrapped by his own devices, and by the wiles of Satan. There is an opportunity of escaping, but he is ignorant of it. Sometimes, alas, he is wilfully ignorant. Man's eternal ruin is often, very often, the fruit of his neglecting his time. He is unwilling to do with his might what his hands find to do, (ver. 10.) Jesus says of the day of wrath: "As a snare shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth."—(Luke xxi. 35.)

It shall come suddenly at last. *Then* the race, which seems now to be to the swift, and the battle which now seems to be to the strong, will be to those whom the world pronounces lame and weak. Human estimates of future success are often greatly at fault. The man who succeeds for *this life* is often a great loser *in the end*. Could we unveil the world of spirits, we should learn not to envy some that we now think prosperous.

13. ¶ *This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me:*

14. *There was a little city, and few men within it: and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it:*

15. *Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.*

16. *Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.*

An incident or fact is here related that came under Solomon's notice. A poor wise man was successful in delivering a small city from a great army. He was successful for others, and procured their temporal salvation, but failed to secure the meed of honour due to him. This was another illustration of Solomon's theme. What profit had this man of all his wisdom and success? He was forgotten! His wisdom was not profitless for others and for this world, but it seemed profitless for himself. He deserved a reward *from men*. But in this life he failed of a reward.

An incident was fresh in the recollection of Solomon somewhat similar to this; but a woman, and not a man, was the deliverer. Joab besieged the city of Abel, where the insurgent Sheba had taken refuge, and a woman cast the head of the rebel over the wall to Joab, which caused him to draw off his forces. 2 Sam. xx. 16–22. Livy tells us how Archimedes saved the city of Syracuse by his engines.

Hitzig argues that this Book of Ecclesiastes was written about two hundred years before Christ came, because the little town of Dora was besieged by Antiochus the Great of Syria, unsuccessfully, 218 years B. C. But it would be folly to pretend that any particular event recorded in profane history is the event referred to. Much more would it be folly to suppose that this book was not written by Solomon, because similar cases occurred after his time.

17. *The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.*

This verse does not contradict the former narrative. The wise man's words *were* heard, and as a consequence the city was delivered; though he was ungratefully forgotten afterward. The demagogue may be popular for a time, but when an emergency arises, the quiet good man will get the ear of the sensible. It is not always the most eloquent that speaks most to the heart. The mother's quiet lessons of truth do more to form characters than the boisterous ravings of the demagogue. Of Jesus it was said, "He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the street." In this and the next verse, Solomon reverts as it would seem to true wisdom,—to piety.

18. *Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good.*

"Knowledge is power," is the modern proverb, but it is Solomon's old proverb recoined; just as it is possible that some of Solomon's gold of Ophir may now be in use in a form different from that in which Solomon left it. What are all the weapons of war without wisdom to use them? "One sinner destroyeth much good." This is in contrast with the good done by the wise or righteous man before mentioned.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Our trust must be in God, not in man.* The race, the victory, success—are not always to the swift, the strong, the skilful. God gives victory and success where man would least expect it. Who would have imagined, as he stood on the mountain above, gazing upon the shepherd boy going down into the valley with sling in hand, unharnessed and unheralded; that he was so soon to sink his missile into the brain of Philistia's proudest champion, whose huge stature and sinewy arm struck terror into

the brave hearts of Israel's warriors? Who would have supposed that this would inaugurate a general overthrow of the enemies of God's people? But more were they that fought on the side of the stripling than they that fought against him. God was for him—God was with him—God guided the smooth stone in its path through the yielding air till it reached the seat of life. "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." If God is on our side we need not fear. The ruler's capacity,—the chieftain's bravery and strategy,—the number of the battalions,—the enthusiasm of the troops,—abundant resources:—all fail till God smiles upon the enterprise. When he favours, "one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." As chariots and horsemen invisible were round about Elisha, so God's unseen hosts encamp around those who pray and trust in God. May he ever vindicate the right.

II. *There is a perfect contrast between the evil influence of the sinner and the good influence of the righteous man.* The accountability of influence! Who can estimate it? We forget our *individual* responsibility in the *mass* of actors with whom we are associated. We suppose ourselves only moving with the current, but we are also drawing others in our wake. If our conduct is evil, especially do we lead others, for it is more congenial to the depraved heart of man to follow evil than good. Parental neglect is felt in the family, extends to the neighbourhood, and the whole community is infected by the lawless conduct of some leading spirit. What anguish is introduced into the family circle, where the proud mother once looked upon her sweet and innocent babes, when, as years roll by, a son becomes an inebriate, or a beloved daughter falls a

prey to the seductions of some heartless seducer! The tears that come gushing from eyes full of parental love, can never blot out the deep disgrace. Nor can the burning tears of the penitent restore the good, that, like a costly vase, has been broken and scattered. The good destroyed by one sinner cannot be conceived of till in eternity we see what a weight of glory has been vilely spurned, and what a weight of misery has been incurred by sin!

The wretch who would purposely introduce a fatal disease into a city would be worthy of deep detestation. But the evil would be but temporal. Could a single person mar the beauty of the whole earth, and cause the breath of the Sirocco to sweep away its teeming multitudes, still the evil would be but temporal. But the sinner tempts his neighbour into perdition—eternal destruction! Persons in positions of *influence* are capable of wielding a power for evil wide as the world and lasting as eternity. On the sacred page we find the name of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, as one who made a whole nation sin. We read there of Hymeneus and Philetus, whose word did eat as a canker, and they overthrew the faith of some of their contemporaries. Achan, by the sin of theft, caused Israel to turn their backs and flee from their enemies, many falling down slain. Such were wandering stars, blighting the earth with their baleful influence.

But if we travel up the stream of time to the first man, we see a moral leprosy emanating from him that has filled the whole world with mourning and woe! Adam, by his own act of disobedience, brought terror, tears, pain, and death upon all his posterity. By sin he bridged the gulf which separated earth from hell, and made a passage for man to the abode prepared for devils. *One sinner did all this!*

But it is not a few notorious sinners only that destroy

much good; but every sinner does so. It is not merely the renowned and the talented,—the Adams, the Jeroboams, and the Byrons; but every one who influences his companion, or neglects the salvation of his own soul;—that does infinite mischief. Sinner, turn, before the ruin is irretrievable!

On the other hand, one good man promotes and accomplishes much good. The "poor wise man" delivered the city. Many have been the noble deliverers of mankind. Noah did not save the whole race, but he saved those who repeopled the world. Joseph saved his father's family, and this resulted in the salvation of a nation, and of the church of God. Esther was raised up to save her people. What an influence for good has been exerted by Paul, and Luther, and Calvin, and Wesley! In the political world Cromwell wrought a great deliverance, and saved England. Public opinion has been various and still may be, as to his true character. But he was one of those men that have left an impress upon the nation. He would do what he deemed his duty, should the heavens fall. And religion and freedom drank new life as he guarded the fountain.

But there was one Man whose influence for good will fill all heaven with rejoicing for countless ages. He delivered not merely a city but a world from destruction. Jesus is the great deliverer—the Saviour of the world. He delivers from the wrath to come. But alas, he too is forgotten. As the poor man who delivered the city was forgotten, so he, after all that he has done for our race, is neglected and despised! This is a sad commentary on human ingratitude.

III. *Power is generally quiet rather than noisy.* "The words of wise men are heard in quiet." To be useful we need not raise a dust with the fury of Jehu. Jesus did

not strive nor cry, nor lift up his voice in the street. His teachings were earnest but quiet. His "*kingdom* cometh not with *observation*." It moulds in silence the heart and its affections. It was not the strong wind, the earthquake, nor the fire, which called back the prophet Elijah to duty; for the Lord was not in these. But it was the "still small voice," sweeter than an angel's lute, that drew his heart. It is so in nature, where God works out his glorious problems. The noiseless sun-beam,—the silent shower,—call out all the glories of the summer landscape. How silent is that power of attraction, by which the planetary worlds are drawn together, and forced onward; thus securing a regular and perfect revolution around their common centre! So in domestic and social life. The quiet power of a mother is felt long after she sleeps in death. Her whispered prayers are not forgotten. Her words of love and truth on the quiet Sabbath evening, have sunk into the mellow soil of the infant heart, to bring forth their fruits when the temples of that infant shall be white with the frosts of four-score winters. The Sabbath-school teacher will find at last, that his quiet labours in his humble sphere have yielded a rich harvest. Go on, parents and teachers, and in your silent way sow seeds of truth. The bread cast upon the waters shall be found after many days. Your beloved children and pupils may greet you with smiles of ineffable joy on the mount above, and pronounce you the instruments of their salvation. Be not discouraged,—a glorious reward is before you.

CHAPTER X.

CONTENTS.

This chapter treats principally of government, and shows the imperfections and uncertainties connected with human governments, and gives wholesome directions on questions connected therewith. This subject naturally falls in with the main theme—the question of earthly advantage.

Analysis. Ver. 1-9.

VERSES 1–3. Wisdom, though of great value, is not so complete in this life as to insure a reputation free from blame.
4. Loyalty is inculcated.
5–7. Through want of discrimination or wisdom, rulers often err in their appointments to office. (Hence we are not to seek in courts or among rulers the profit for which Solomon was inquiring.)
8, 9. Attempts at revolution are attended with great danger.

EXPOSITION.

1. *Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.*

Prof. Stuart supposes that no comparison is here intended between the first part of the verse and the last part, but that they are both separate illustrations of the preceding verse, "One sinner destroyeth much good." Dead flies destroy the perfume, and a little folly destroys the wisdom of the wise, as one sinner destroys good.

But our translation gives a beautiful illustration, which the original implies, though it does not present it in the *form* of a comparison as the translation does.

There are but few characters of such complete symmetry in virtue, that *all* "folly" is excluded. There is now and then a Joseph, a Daniel, or a Washington; who

though not perfect is a beautiful model of a virtuous man. But the most of good men have some "dead flies" of folly in their characters, which injure the aroma of their virtuous deeds. In vii. 1, we are taught that a good name is better than precious ointment. Here we are taught that this good name may be injured by small indiscretions, so that the savour of it is lost, and becomes offensive. "Dead flies" in the plural, is followed by a singular verb in the original. But this is not strange, for the "dead flies" are considered as a mass of offensive material in the vessel of perfume.

2. *A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart is at his left.*

If this language is to be understood literally, we are all fools, for those who understand the position of the parts of the human body, know, that the heart is at the left rather than the right side. But the meaning is figurative, like that in the second chapter and fourteenth verse. "The wise man's eyes are in his head."

The "right hand" implies skill and promptitude. The word *dexterity* is from the Latin *dexter* or right hand. The heart is used sometimes for the intellect,—sometimes for the passions. In the next verse it is translated *wisdom*. The meaning, then, seems to be, *the wisdom of the wise man is at hand, i. e.*, ready to be used. In emergencies he has presence of mind. But fools neglect their opportunities. The Chaldee paraphrast (as quoted by Bishop Patrick) says, "The heart of the wise, inclines to the law of God, which was given from God's right hand; the fool's to silver and gold, which are the gifts of the left." But this is fanciful. Jacob's heart was at his right hand, when preparing to meet his brother Esau. He did not get into a flurry, into confusion. He went to God in

prayer, and then prepared his presents, and skilfully arranged his procession. The result was, that his brother was pacified. Paul's heart was at his right hand, when arrayed before his enemies he cried, "I am a Pharisee," &c. This caused dissension among his opposers, and he was thereby delivered. That man's heart is at his right hand that asks wisdom from God.

3. *Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool.*

The fool's *heart* faileth him by the way. His conduct shows what his mind is. His thoughts are transparent, so that every one can read his character. Professor Stuart translates it—"he saith of every one: He is a fool." "He deems himself to be wise, and every one else to be a fool." Which is the proper meaning may be somewhat difficult to ascertain. Both seem suitable to the case in hand.

4. *If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.*

In the courts of princes men are often in danger from the hasty spirit of the ruler. *With* cause or *without* cause, the ruler may take offence. But still it is the duty of officers to maintain their loyalty, "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward."

Leave not thy place, *i. e.*, to oppose his authority, or to get rid of duty. You *may* resign, and ought to do so if the moral influence of a resignation will do good. Or if a man's own reputation would suffer, or his conscience be violated by continuing in office, let him resign at once though he should suffer loss thereby. But be of a yielding disposition, and the king's wrath will abate. "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger."

5. *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler.*

6. *Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.*

7. *I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.*

One cause of disloyalty, is, the civil and military appointments of improper men, by the rulers. If taken from the low and ignorant, they are apt to be unqualified, but at the same time supercilious and overbearing. It is true that persons taken from humble life have sometimes proved excellent ministers of state. From obscure families good rulers have been raised up to do a good work for God and their country. Joseph was taken from humble life to be the prime minister of Pharaoh. David was a shepherd boy, and became, as a ruler, a man after God's own heart. Esther, the beautiful and accomplished queen of Persia, who was brought to the kingdom at the proper juncture, and who thereby saved her nation the Jews from a general slaughter, was previously an obscure orphan. But "*folly*" should not be "set in dignity." This error proceeds from the ruler when he makes bad appointments. Bridges says, "A matter of much evil and grief is the capricious advancement of despicable upstarts." James Monroe, when President of the United States, was by no means a brilliant ruler. But he displayed great wisdom in the selection of his cabinet, and in his other official appointments, so that his administration was one of the best and most prosperous. Great interests should not be committed to incompetent persons, or to persons of doubtful honesty and morality. And men who will take upon them important offices in church or state without being qualified, assume awful responsibility. And there is often too little care in Republican governments, in selecting public officers.

The word "rich," in this passage, (ver. 6,) may be ren-

dered "right," according to Gesenius. It is contrasted with "folly," or foolish. "Folly is set in great dignity, and the right, (the qualified, the deserving,) sit in low place."

Riding on horses, was a mark of honour or of office. Mordecai was thus honoured, and Haman who was high in office was made his servant to lead his horse. See also Jer. xvii. 24, 25. Jesus (Ps. xlv.) "rides forth prosperously,"—*i. e.*, as a prince he succeeds. In the Revelation (vi. 2) he is represented as riding upon a white horse, "conquering and to conquer." Judges and other rulers rode upon asses. Judg. v. 10; x. 4: xii. 14. Hence the expressiveness of Jesus' riding into Jerusalem upon this kind of an animal. It indicated that he was a ruler, a judge.

8. *He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.*

9. *Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.*

Evil shall fall upon the heads of those who devise it for others. They shall be caught in their own snare. This has reference to the same subject—government. The crafty designing men who lay snares and dig pits for others, shall be caught themselves. The fate of Absalom, Adonijah, and Sheba, were fresh in Solomon's recollection. The same truth is illustrated in the histories of Haman and the accusers of Daniel. They dug their own pit. Many a crafty politician has done the same. "*Whoso breaketh a hedge*,"—the hedge of civil government,—"a serpent shall bite him;"—he shall be assailed where he least expected it. It is dangerous to pull down old walls or break hedges, lest serpents bite us. So it is dangerous to attempt to take away the wall of law and government or seek a revolution. The removal of stones, seems to

refer to the stones which marked boundaries, and the cleaving of wood may also refer to the same, as both stone and wood are employed to mark lines and corners as the boundaries of land. It is dangerous to attempt a revolution. "*What profit*" in such an attempt? The question of the treatise remains unsolved.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Folly, however little, stains the character of the otherwise good man.* Indeed the better a man's general character, the more conspicuous his defects, and the more painful are they to others.

Dead flies would hardly be noticed in the squalid huts of the lazaroni, or in a neglected vessel. But when you open a box of *incense*, hoping to inhale its sweet perfume, and are greeted with the odour of dead flies, you are vexed and disappointed. Lord Bacon says, "In a pure diamond, of great lustre, the very least speck or smallest cloud strikes the eye, and affects it with a kind of trouble; which in a grosser stone would scarce be observed." We feel almost distressed when we look upon a piece of statuary exquisitely carved, but with a little piece knocked off by the hand of some Vandal. We could almost weep to see a finished life-like painting of a dear friend, defaced with a single spot of ink. In a piece of statuary less complete, or in a painting less beautiful and less dear to us, the defect would not so annoy us. In a piece of music of delightful melody, a single discordant note jars more harshly on the ear than if the other notes were less harmonious. So in a virtuous life, admired by all, a blemish is more to be regretted than when found in a character less pure. To read of the sins of David, or the errors of Abraham, fills us with far more regret than to read of the sins and errors of less virtuous men. Let a man of high attainments in piety

and knowledge, be suddenly overcome with anger, and say harsh and petulant words; and you regret it far more than when you hear such words from one whose general character corresponds. Good men should, therefore, be doubly on their guard, lest they bring a greater reproach upon religion than less virtuous men can do. Let us all seek grace to enable us to show forth the excellency of our holy religion, in the presence of a gainsaying world. And when life ends—when the box is broken, may the savour of our good works be like that of Mary's ointment poured upon the head of Jesus.

II. *We learn the danger of removing the old landmarks of government.*

Civil government is an ordinance of God. It is only when the yoke of oppression is beyond endurance that a revolution is justifiable. So fearful are the consequences of attempts at revolution when these attempts prove abortive; and so vast the sacrifice of human life, even when successful, that reformers would do well to pause before they attempt to remove the old landmarks. What though "the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee." What though "folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place." What though the low and unworthy are exalted, and the best men degraded; time and constitutional effort may work a change. It is better to suffer many wrongs than involve a whole kingdom in bloodshed and ruin. But a revolution attempted when there are no wrongs to be redressed, when the government is paternal, guarding the rights and liberties of the people, is a wickedness, the enormity of which cannot be estimated. And ruin falls upon the heads of those who undertake it. The pit is dug for subverting the government, but he that digs it is the first to fall into it. He breaks the hedge of defence,

and a serpent bites him. He "removeth stones," the old landmarks of government, and is "hurt thereby." He "cleaveth wood," separateth the people into different confederacies, and endangereth his own life. The violent man, the intriguer, shall fall into his *own* pit—be bitten by the serpent that his *own* hand uncovers—be hurt by the very laws which he would roll away, for, like the ponderous rock, they fall and crush him—be cut asunder by the very weapon by which he would divide and destroy his country.

Absalom laid a scheme (dug a pit) for the destruction of his father, and the seizing of Jerusalem. His violent dealings came down upon his own pate.

Adonijah perished miserably after having undertaken to seize the reins of government. Sheba sought to divide the government, and was destroyed. These things were fresh in the recollection of Solomon. Thus secret conspiracies against the government, and violent efforts to remove the old landmarks, may recoil with a fearful blow upon the perpetrators. If men in their self-delusion, through lust for power, break the "hedge" of law, and assail their government, they will receive the terrible fangs of the serpent that lies coiled beneath. The axe which is used to cut down the tree of liberty, which spreads out its fair branches of protection over our homes and social institutions, has a keen edge for the perpetrator. "The battle-axe" may sever its noble trunk, and cleave it asunder, but he who handles it will in turn be severed by the axe of justice.

Those also that plot against the church of God, and take away the old landmarks, introducing novel doctrines and unscriptural practices, may well tremble for themselves. The pit is ready—the old serpent who counsels them will sting their souls for ever—the axe of divine jus-

tice will cut them asunder, and their portion will be appointed "with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Analysis. Verses 10-20.

VERSE 10. If we would be *successful*, we must be wise in the means used, as well as industrious, and disarm opposition. (This is especially so in matters of government.)

11–14. Let us not entrust matters to those that are likely to betray us.

15. Nor to the ignorant and inexperienced.

16, 17. Inexperienced and intemperate rulers are contrasted with the experienced and temperate.

18. A government (compared to a house) falls to ruins by inattention on the part of rulers.

19. Feasting and wine may make rulers merry: but a nation needs something better than merry rulers;—it needs money, resources.

20. Disloyalty should not exist even *in thought*.

EXPOSITION.

10. *If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.*

Professor Stuart translates the tenth verse thus: "If one has dulled the iron, and there is no edge, he swings (it) that he may increase the force; an advantage is the dexterous use of wisdom." He argues that "the dexterity in the case of a tool that is dulled, consists in so swinging it and increasing its force, as still to make it cut;" and not as in our translation, in whetting the edge. He says that "the notion of polishing or sharpening has no etymological ground of support." However one of the definitions of the Hebrew word (translated *whet*) in Kal is, *to become small* or be diminished. In Pilpel therefore, where the word is found in the original, it may well be

translated *sharpen*, for diminishing the edge is sharpening the tool. This too is plain common sense. Much of the mechanic's success is in keeping his tools in order. So in correcting abuses in government, the means are to be wisely chosen as well as skilfully applied. The cleaving of wood, mentioned in verse 9, suggested this remark. So the biting of the serpent, mentioned in verse 8, suggested the next verse. The serpent must be charmed, if you would prevent its biting. Grind your axe if you would escape the danger of giving too powerful blows,—and charm the serpent if you would prevent its bite. So in correcting abuses in the government, act cautiously, and skilfully, and wisely, or you endanger yourself.

11. *Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.*

The serpent will bite without enchantment, *i. e.*, unless enchanted. The charming of serpents is a great feat for modern jugglers, as it was among the ancients.

In Psalm lviii. 4, 5, wicked rulers are compared to serpents and adders that will not be charmed. God says to the Jews, (Jer. viii. 17,) "I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord." In verses 8, 9, Solomon had shown the danger of violently changing the government. Here he teaches that if a change is needed, it must be attempted judiciously. Prepare your instrument, and charm your enemy, thus disarming him of his power to harm you. Lord Bacon says, "A wise election of means is more efficacious in accomplishing one's purpose, than any enforcement or accumulation of endeavours." "A lame man in the way," says another, "will out-run a foot-boy out of it." Especially is it necessary to be careful as to whom secrets are entrusted. If you have plans to

carry out, affecting the welfare of the government, do not entrust your matters to babblers. They are no better than serpents untamed or not enchanted. All kinds of beasts, and even "serpents have been tamed of mankind," says the apostle James, "but the tongue can no man tame." By "a babbler,"—literally "a master of the tongue,"—we may understand either a flatterer, a slanderer, or a betrayer of secrets. Governments sometimes necessarily have secrets, and they who will reveal them are not to be entrusted with important affairs.

12. *The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.*

13. *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.*

There is a striking contrast here presented. The wise man's words are a favour even to others;—the fool's lips are an injury even to himself. They "swallow up himself." They are the "sepulchre of his own reputation." He goes from bad to worse. He first talks foolishly of treasure,—then he counsels mischievously and madly.

14. *A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?*

He is full of words as to what he will do—full of boasting. He tells what he will do hereafter. But "a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him. who can tell him?" This passage corresponds with Jas. iv. 13–16: "Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye re-

joice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil." Some think that the last clauses of the verse are specimens of the fool's talk;—and that the expressions, "A man cannot tell what shall be," and "what shall be after him, who can tell him?" are adduced as his common-place and incoherent language. But why should that language in the mouth of a fool be considered "common-place and incoherent," which is considered quite wise in the mouth of Solomon himself? Chap. viii. 7 and vi. 12, is almost the precise language here used. No doubt the language is used concerning the boaster. With all his boasting, "he cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him?" This view of the subject seems to be confirmed by the next verse, as expounded (as it seems to be) by the apostle James, who connects boasting of going to the city, with not knowing what will be on the morrow, just as they are connected here.

15. *The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.*

So far from saying "I will go to such a city, and buy, and sell, and get gain," the fool ought to be humble; for he knoweth not how even to *go to* the city, much less to make himself prosperous there.

16. ¶ *Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!*

17. *Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!*

Here is a contrast between inexperienced and intemperate rulers on the one hand, and wise and temperate rulers on the other. Some young persons have ruled with the wisdom of mature years. And some older rulers have shown themselves to be mere children in wisdom.

Rehoboam acted *like* a child, though forty-one years old when he came to the throne. His son Abijah speaks of him as having been "young and tender-hearted" at that time. 2 Chron. xiii. 7. Woe to the land whose rulers have the inexperience and ignorance of children. Also woe to the land whose rulers follow pleasure more than the business of their high vocation. To "eat in the morning"—early, was a mark of intemperance among the ancients. Intemperance, ruinous to all who indulge in it, is especially dangerous in rulers. "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted." Prov. xxxi. 4, 5. By "due season" we are to understand, a *suitable time*. "Son of nobles"—in the Septuagint υἱος ἐλευθερων. —may mean persons skilled in civil liberty or who have come to office in a legal manner. It does not refer so much to *lineal descent* from the free and noble, as to *skill* in things connected with a free government. A son of strength is a warrior. A son of wickedness is a wicked man. So a "son of nobles," or of free-born, as it may be rendered, is a citizen-nobleman; one who is skilled in things pertaining to free government. Indeed the word rendered "child," ver. 16, may be rendered servant. If so rendered the contrast appears more complete and manifest.

18. ¶ *By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through.*

Under the emblem of a building decaying through slothfulness, so that the rain drops through the roof, the author shows that the framework of government needs constant vigilance and attention. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." Evils springing up in a government are to

be attended to *in time*. The leaks are to be stopped, and the rotten timbers to be renewed, lest the whole structure fall in ruins. Rulers at ease and indulging in luxury and intemperance are in danger of letting abuses crêep in, to the great detriment of the country. This is brought out in the next verse.

19. *A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.*

Scott says, "While they (profligate rulers) are making feasts and indulging themselves in wine, as if they had nothing to do, but to laugh and be merry; the public treasure is wasted, the national defence is neglected, heavy taxes must be imposed, and the people grow discontented, the enemies are emboldened, and everything concurs to bring dire calamities on the state." "Money answereth all things;" *i. e.*, it is essential for carrying on the affairs of government. There must be resources if the state is to prosper. With money other things can generally be obtained.

20. *Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bed-chamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.*

The author before closing his remarks about the affairs of state, deems it necessary to caution his hearers against disloyalty, even in thought. Too much license is often taken, especially in free governments, in uttering words disrespectful of those in authority. Disloyal words come from disloyal thoughts. Disobedience begins in the "thought." To speak evil of dignities is both dangerous and wicked. "Thou shalt not revile the gods, (magistrates,) nor curse the ruler of thy people." Ex. xxii. 28. The word "rich" here, as in the sixth verse, might be rendered, *noble, honourable*. "A bird of the air." Some

unseen event will bring out the secret word to the light, as though a bird had carried it. As "murder will out," so injurious words, however secret, may be discovered. One thing is certain, viz.: however secret our words and thoughts may now be, they are all open before God, and will be divulged before an assembled universe when God shall call us to his bar, and judge the world in righteousness.

Hengstenberg's Commentary on Ecclesiastes is very able, as might be expected from such a source. But the assumption that the book was written to comfort the Israelites when under the Persians, during the captivity, has led him to adopt many fanciful interpretations. It has given a tinge to his whole work, and led him to make applications of many passages to things existing in the Persian government, which seem strained and unnatural. He looks upon the writer of Ecclesiastes as a timid man, afraid to say anything against the Persian rule except in "a vague and indistinct manner;" and yet thus saying it. In this way he accounts for our inability to understand portions of the book. In his remarks under this verse he says, "The author now assigns the reason why, in the part immediately preceding, and in fact throughout the whole book, he had spoken of the circumstances of the Persian Empire in such a vague and indistinct manner. Openness under a tyrannical government is dangerous and ruinous." But would this be the course of an honest writer, especially of an *inspired* writer? Would he throw out hints merely? So did not the prophets. Would he write in "a vague and indistinct manner" lest the Persian authorities punish him; and then say in the very work that he was afraid would make known his views too manifestly, "I am doing this very quietly, lest it should get to the ears of the king and nobles?" Certainly not. Candour

and openness mark all the inspired writings, and this book as well as others.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Preparation is half the victory.* The oak is to be felled. Shall I rush forth with a dull axe, and deal heavy blows, and strain my muscles, and sweat at every pore, to make but little impression? Or shall I not rather prepare my tool by sharpening it, and then go forth, and with half the labour soon accomplish the work? The man who whets his scythe does not lose time thereby. So in the work of God and the promotion of his kingdom, great preparations are to be made, without which we labour in vain, and spend our strength for naught. God himself makes preparations for carrying on his work. These preparations are what are usually termed "second causes." They are God's instruments. He is not bound to the laws of nature;—he can suspend or alter them at pleasure. It is all one to him what instruments he employs, for "nothing is too hard for the Almighty." But still he uses instruments, and he *prepares* them for their work. It is presumption then in us to attempt to build up his kingdom without preparation. "Wisdom is better than strength." Human reason has been given that man may adapt means to ends, and thus accomplish the work that he has to do.

Let the young man who expects to preach the everlasting gospel *prepare* for his work. Let his heart be moulded into the spirit of Christ. Let his intellect be sharpened by study. Let his memory and judgment and all his faculties be improved. Let him endeavour to go forth a complete workman, and then he can accomplish a great work for his Master. Some allow their zeal to outrun their preparation, and enter prematurely upon the work of the ministry. But it is far better to make due

preparation, and then with all its advantages to go forth to the great battle. And ministers should often sharpen their axe, if they would execute their appointed work. When not casting the gospel net, they should be mending it, if they would become fishers of men. Sometimes we are called to the sudden and unexpected performance of some duty. Then, of course, we have no time for special preparation. But by seeking to excel in all things, we may be better prepared for emergencies than those are who are habitually negligent. Ministers of the gospel should so study as to be able always to have important truths on hand. Dr. Morrison, before the Alumni of a Divinity School, said, "The stripling minister who fills the shepherd's pouch with shining pebbles gathered on the shallow borders of the stream, to throw them out the next Sunday to his admiring flock, will find to his sorrow that more than half the beauty that dazzled him is lost before he gets them home. He who plunges beneath the tide, who explores its dark caves and mysteries, and gathers in the solemn depths, the precious though at first unsightly pearls, is he who permanently enriches alike himself and others."

II. *Leaks must be stopped* IN TIME. "Through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through." The roof leaks from inattention and idleness. And the longer it is neglected, the more difficult will it be to repair it. Let little evils creep into a government, and unless eradicated they will increase, and eventually destroy the whole frame-work. A little fire unquenched may soon destroy a city. In *families*, the first evil habits of children should be corrected. If allowed to grow, the whole family may be disgraced. The same is true of the *church*. A Hymeneus and Philetus will destroy the faith of many.

Their word will "eat as doth a canker." Make but a little breach in the dam of church order and discipline, and the whole church is inundated. A little sin *indulged* in the heart will lead to greater. We may say, "is it not a little one?" but it increases. Satan does not attack the heart by storm, but insinuates himself while the sentinels are sleeping. He removes one shingle at a time, till the roof leaks, and "the house droppeth through." "Avoid even the appearance of evil."

III. *Let the tongue be well guarded.* "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." The babbler, serpent-like, strikes his fangs into the most unspotted character. Words should be few and well ordered. Fitly spoken, they are like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

"A little said—and truly said—
Can deeper joy impart
Than hosts of words, which reach the head,
But never touch the heart.
The voice that wins its sunny way,
A lonely home to cheer,
Hath oft the fewest words to say;
But oh! those few—how dear!"

The tongue is a fountain of life, or a world of iniquity. It takes either grace or the grave to tame the unruly tongue. But "the tongue of the just is as choice silver." "The lips of the righteous feed many." Viewed in this light, how blessed is the privilege of preaching the gospel! To be God's ambassador, furnished with a message of peace, offering life to dying men, is the highest privilege conferred on man! Angels might covet the work. "Who is sufficient for these things?"

CHAPTER XI.

CONTENTS.

This remarkable chapter is the focus of the blended rays of the whole book. It is a clear presentation of a future judgment *and* reward, *in beautiful figures of illustration. All along we have had hints, and some positive declarations; but here we have it asserted in emphatic language, that God will bring us to judgment for the doings of this life, and that all that we do will have a bearing upon the future. There is no profit in this life without another;* but THERE IS ANOTHER.

Analysis. Verses 1-10.

VERSES 1–6. Do present duty, on all occasions, and all your lives, disregarding threatening obstacles; trusting God to reward you. This is illustrated, ver. 1, By casting bread upon the waters: ver. 2, By giving portions to many: ver. 3, By the clouds and falling timber: vs. 4, 6, By sowing and reaping grain: ver. 5, By the unborn infant.

7–10. Use God's gifts with reference to rendering an account: and provide against future misery. We may sum up the teachings of the chapter in these few words, viz.: DO and ENJOY with reference to a FUTURE AWARD.

EXPOSITION.

1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.*

This is said with reference to sowing grain, especially the rice. Cast forth thy bread-corn upon the waters. That corn is sometimes called bread appears elsewhere. The word translated *bread* in this place, is translated bread-corn in Isa. xxviii. 28. "Bread-corn is bruised: because he will not ever be threshing it." When the Nile overflows its banks, and is subsiding, the inhabitants of the country sow their rice upon the waters spread over the

country, and it sinks into the water and mud deposited there, and afterward grows and produces a rich harvest. It is found "after many days," multiplied an hundred fold. The prophet Isaiah says, xxiii. 3: "And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river, is her revenue." Scott comments on the passage thus. "Sihor means the river Nile. It had its name from the blackness of its waters charged with the mud, which it brings down from Ethiopia, when it overflows. * * * The harvest of the river, springing from the seed sown when its great waters subsided, yielded an immense revenue to Tyre." Solomon's intercourse with Egypt enabled him to speak as he did. And among his hearers there may have been persons well acquainted with the method of raising grain in Egypt.

This passage (Eccl. xi. 1) has reference not only to giving alms, but to all good works. Sowing grain is always an act of faith or trust in God. When strewed upon the waters, or even upon the ground, it *seems* to be thrown away and lost. Just so is it with many an act of charity and deed done for God's glory. But there will be a future harvest. *The seed has a future errand.*

2. *Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.*

A definite number is here used for an indefinite. Distribute to *many*. Do good not in *one* channel merely, but "to all men as you have opportunity." "Blessed are ye that sow beside *all* waters." Isa. xxxii. 20. The reason for giving and doing good to many, is, "thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Many, on the contrary, withhold *for this very reason*. They fear future evil which will involve them in poverty and want; and consequently they will not give. But their conduct is like

that of the man who refuses to sow a portion of his grain, for fear that there will be scarcity the next year. To avoid scarcity let him sow. So to avoid want and poverty, let him give and do present duty. "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." Prov. xix. 17. The man who in times of scarcity will divide with the needy, will not be left to want. If not prospered in this life, his deed of love prompted by Christian motives will be remembered and rewarded hereafter. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Luke xvi. 9. *The gift has a future errand.*

3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.*

The clouds distribute their stores. They are full of future good to the earth. They are not afraid to scatter their stores for the benefit of others. Nor ought we to be afraid to give of ours. *The clouds have a future errand.*

As we fell a tree in one direction or another, so it will lie. The tree generally falls in the direction in which it leans, and as it falls it lies. So we die in the direction in which we live; and as we die, so will it be with us for ever. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still. He that is holy, let him be holy still." "*The growing tree has a future errand.*" Men are often compared to trees in Scripture. Dan. iv. 19.

4. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that re-*

gardeth the clouds shall not reap. 6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.*

These two verses have here been thrown together because they are on the same subject. Be not discouraged at the threatening wind or clouds. Go forth, notwithstanding the cold wind, and sow your seed. Hasten with sickle in hand to reap the harvest, though clouds may threaten a storm. Go forth at all times, and in all periods of life, and serve God, in doing good. You know not what shall prosper; but it is your duty to entrust it all to God. Duties are ours—results are God's. God will give you a harvest whether you sow in the morning, noonday, or evening of life. Spend your whole lifetime in his service, and you will be certain of a glorious reward. *The sower and reaper have a future errand.*

5. *As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.*

Thou knowest not the way that the soul is formed, whence it comes, nor how it is united to the body. Thou knowest not how the parts of the unborn infant mature for a future existence. But your ignorance does not prevent the result. So you may be ignorant of the *process* by which God brings about his purposes. But the result is certain. God will bring about in his own silent and hidden way the birth of all his glorious purposes, as he does the birth of an infant. *The unborn child has a future errand. Every thing* tends to some great future! "An eternity is in the heart of every thing." See on iii. 11.

7. ¶ *Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.*

The present life is joyous, or may be made so. The rising sun is a glorious object. How sweet is the morning light! The morn of life may also be made joyful.

In comparing this chapter with the first, one is struck with the repetition of the same figures. We have the sun, the wind, the rivers. In the first chapter they are used to illustrate this life while leaving the future out of view;—in this chapter they are used to illustrate this life in view of the future life. *There* the generations of men and their labours seemed like the sun of one day following the sun of another in an endless and useless round. They seemed like one gust of wind blowing after another without a result. They seemed like the mighty tide of the Nile or the Euphrates flowing merely to fill the sea, without effecting the object. That was viewing this world by itself,—irrespective of another. *Here* the generations of men, with their varied employments, viewed in the light of the future, seem like the "sweet" light of the sun cheering the eyes, warming the earth, ripening the harvest, and therefore having a blessed errand. They seem like the wind carrying about the clouds to drop their fatness on the ploughed fields, or overturning the trees, and thus doing a great work. They seem like the Nile overflowing its banks, on whose waters the bread-corn is cast, thus bringing about a future harvest of joy. By these illustrations a future is unfolded, and we are thus prepared for the following verses, with the doctrine of a future judgment fully brought out.

8. *But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.*

Professor Stuart gives a somewhat different translation, thus, "But if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in all of them; yet let him remember the days of dark-

ness, for they will be many. All that cometh (into the world) is vanity." If this translation is correct, then it is an advice "to enjoy all that we can rationally enjoy." But we must so enjoy as to have our eye still directed to the coming days of darkness. Days of affliction and sorrow come to the aged, as shown in the next chapter. The last clause tells us why—because "all that cometh is vanity." All are subject to disease and death—all that come into the world will have sorrow more or less. The meaning may be, in accordance with our translation, though the day shall be unclouded, a *dark night* follows, if there is nothing but earthly joy.

9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

Two views have been taken of this verse. One view is that the joy and cheer spoken of has reference to forbidden sensual enjoyments and pleasures. If so, it is severe irony. Rejoice in sensual pleasure:—but remember you will be judged for it. Indeed elsewhere, to seek after one's own heart and eyes, is to *conduct sinfully*. See Num. xv. 39; Deut. xxix. 19; Job xxxi. 7. The other view taken of this verse is that it is an exhortation to enjoy in the season of youth whatever is seen and desired calculated to increase one's innocent happiness. Stuart gives the purport of the passage thus: "Whatever thou seest and desirest which would increase thy happiness, enjoy it. But *know well*, *i. e.*, remember in the midst of thine enjoyment, that God will bring thee into judgment for the manner in which everything of this nature is accomplished." And he gives the purport of the last clause thus: "Abuse not his blessings and thy comforts or pleasures. He will surely call thee to an account for all that

thou doest." Pleasures are not to be condemned if they are innocent pleasures. But the plea of innocency is often put in, when the pleasure is far from being innocent. Let us remember the judgment in all our enjoyments, lest we abuse God's mercies.

In this verse, Solomon rises to the majesty of his theme, and brings out boldly the *great point* for which he had been all along preparing the minds of his hearers.

As the grain sown brings a harvest;—as the portion given shall be rewarded;—as the clouds shall distill their fatness upon the earth;—so the young man is doing and enjoying for *the judgment!* What advantage is there in life without another life? But there *is* a future life—there *is* a judgment. And God will bring us to it.

10. *Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity.*

Bishop Patrick says that, "*sorrow* relates to the *mind*, including all the perturbances, as fierceness, rage, sadness, fretting, and vexation." He says that "*evil*" refers to the *body*. "Put away evil from thy *flesh*."

It seems altogether likely that Solomon means, put away *future* sorrow. And he tells us *how* in the next verse, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." A youth of sensual pleasure brings an old age of sorrow, as shown in the next chapter. It may be added, that, it brings an eternity of woe, as indicated by the 9th verse. A judgment implies condemnation of the wicked.

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *We are to do our duty, with reference to a future result, committing all to God.* Duties are *ours*—events are *God's*. It is ours to cast the bread-corn on the waters;—to distribute to various objects "seven and also eight;"—to cast it forth in the morning and evening of life, when

the heart is young and merry, and when gray hairs are upon us;—to cast it forth without fear of wind or cloud, with firm reliance on God. The good seed shall not be lost. "He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." God will watch over every effort made to promote his glory and the good of men, and abundantly reward the actor. The reward will be in part in this life, in a good conscience and in the favour of God. Many a deed of love, which seemed at first to be lost labour, will be seen "after many days" to have been the seed sown in hope and in tears for a harvest of joy. The seed which *seems* to be lost, at length shoots up a tiny blade. While the sower sleeps it grows. While he is busy elsewhere it matures into beauty and ripeness. Days pass, and behold he looks upon a precious harvest. He forgets his toil and anxiety and care and fears, for now he enters upon the reward. And oh what a "harvest home" awaits him, as on some heavenly hill he shall stand among the angels, and with a wreath upon his brow shall shout that God has given him a harvest of glory!

But a single act of duty should not suffice. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight." "Sow beside *all* waters." "Be instant in season—out of season." "Do good to all men." And let it not suffice to do good at one period of life only. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand."

Let not threatening evils deter us from duty. What though the winds are sharp and piercing. What though the clouds threaten. Who does not know that God "tempers the wind," and that the storm will soon pass away, and leave a blessing behind it? Looking from one stand-point, the wind and the clouds, the bright sun and the running rivers, seem useless—injurious. "Alas, this

fierce wind!" cries the invalid. "Ah, these dark and foreboding clouds!" says the gardener. The sun is too hot—the rivers are too much swollen—for the traveller. But look at them from another point of view, and the richest blessings are in their train. The river rises to fertilize the country; and the barren fields rejoice. Winds scatter the miasma—bring fructifying showers—and waft to port the weary mariner. The sun warms the earth, and a thousand warblers hymn his rising. So looking at God's works from an earthly stand-point merely, and no deliverance is wrought worthy of the great Worker. But looking at them from the stand-point of the Bible to their final consummation in *the infinite future*, all things proclaim aloud their Creator's glory. Therefore sow the seed of truth, and let God mature it into a harvest.

Ye *ministers* of religion, cast your bread upon the waters. "Behold a sower went forth to sow." It is yours to throw, broad-cast, the good seed of God's word. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Your field may seem unpromising—your toil may be severe. But cheer up, for "in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." "The waters which thou sawest," said the angel to John, "are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." Rev. xvii. 15. Among these waters, let the good seed be cast in these days of missionary labour, and after many days the toiling messengers shall reap. Toil on, ye devoted men of God, a glorious harvest is before you.

Ye *parents*, cast your bread upon the waters. You have a virgin soil in which to cast the seed. Unless you pre-occupy that soil with the good seed of truth, error, like noxious weeds, will flourish there. Now is your time to plant. The good seed may seem to perish.

And many a praying mother has gone to the grave ere the result of her prayers and instructions was known, But heaven will unfold it all; and the trees of her little nursery on earth shall be transplanted to bear fruit in the paradise of God.

Ye *teachers*, who on the holy day of God gather your classes around you, cast your bread upon the waters. You may have obstacles to encounter. But it will be a blessed privilege to reap the harvest, after sowing in *doubt*, and *perplexity*, and tears. The soil which you cultivate is mellow, and ready for the truth. Yours is the blessed privilege of sowing it there.

II. *Enjoy the world, with reference to the judgment.* "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." How joyful is it to witness the returning dawn of day after a dark night! The streaks of light dart athwart the horizon. Presently the distant hill-tops catch the sun-beams. The lark carols forth her joy. The lambkin rises from his grassy bed, and gambols with delight. The blossoms open their petals in beauty to the sun. All nature smiles as it basks in the beams of the great luminary of day. There is joy "under the sun." There is joy in this life. But the sun shines upon us, not merely that we should bask in its beams. We may bask and refresh ourselves, but the sun calls us to labour as well as to enjoyment. It is not merely to look at—to enjoy. It is that we may do the work of the day. The rising sun calls us forth to labour. "The sun ariseth—man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." Ps. civ. 22, 23. The young man may seek enjoyment, but it is not the great business of life. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth. Let thy heart cheer thee." But the young and old are to labour

as well as to enjoy. "In the *morning*" of life, "sow thy seed." Work while the day lasts. Let not your life be a life of *mere* pleasure—earthly pleasure. Seek enduring happiness.

There is a sweeter light than that of the natural day. There is a Sun more glorious than that of the natural sun. It is "*the Sun of Righteousness*," who has healing in his beams. O, it is light indeed when he shines upon the heart! "I have never seen the sun," said a blind Choctaw. "I am told that it is very bright and beautiful. But it cannot be so bright as Jesus shining into my heart." "Do you see the sun?" said the dying Glenn, as the sun shone out suddenly. "The Sun of righteousness looks far more bright to me, but not with the same kind of brightness;—O, the smile of the Saviour!" And his *own* countenance was radiant with joy. But even the Sun of righteousness does not shine wholly that we may *enjoy*. He shines that we may *labour*.

All toil is pleasant though, with his beams falling upon us. Other pleasures are comparatively insipid. The intoxicating bowl proffers pleasure. So does the theatre—the ball-room. But they yield no true happiness. In the midst of the pleasure, that unwelcome—"Know thou"—comes in, followed by—"*for all these things* God will bring thee into judgment." How grand will be the occasion, when the whole family of man, "from Adam to his last son," shall stand before the Judge, and receive their several sentences? Not one righteous person will be overlooked—not one wicked man will find a hiding-place. And recollect—"as the tree falls, so it shall be." This evidently refers to the *fixed* condition of the dead. And it is a solemn admonition to the living—to the young especially. A poet says,

"Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined."

As the sapling is inclined, it grows—southward or northward. When the time comes for it to fall, it falls in the direction in which it leans. And "as the tree falls, so it shall be." So is it with man. The child is the little scion now taking its shape. It may lean to virtue or vice. As the youth leans, so he will ordinarily grow. As he lives he ordinarily dies. As he dies so is his eternal state. To fall heavenward we must lean heavenward. Grace alone can bend us to virtue and toward heaven. But God makes use of the moulding influence of teachers, parents, and ministers.

CHAPTER XII.

CONTENTS.

This chapter contains the conclusion of Solomon's sermon or treatise, together with the reflections of the editor or publisher on the whole discourse. Under the emblem of an old decaying house, the old man with his various afflictions is strikingly set forth. Then the author, in literal language, comes to this sublime conclusion: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." From the 8th verse to the end we have the reflections of another person (apparently) who was also inspired, and who praises the Preacher's (Solomon's) wisdom, and tells how he taught the people. He also admonishes to regard the words of the wise rather than a multitude of useless books: and concludes with showing that this sermon teaches what the whole interest of man is, and that there will be a final judgment.

Analysis. Ver. 1-7.

VERSE 1. To avoid future sorrow, and evil, remember your Creator in the youth of life, as the most favourable time. The reasons are:
2. Old age brings sorrow of *mind*, (if the youthful days are spent in sin.)
3–5. Old age brings infirmities of *body*:
6. Ending in death:
7. And the return of the body to the dust, and of the soul to God.

EXPOSITION.

1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

Solomon had probably already begun to feel a premature decline, as the fruit of former excesses. And as his was not the joyousness of "a green old age" he warns the young against forgetting their Creator, and walking in the way of evil. If the first season of comparative leisure (youth) is spent in *dissipation*, the last season of leisure

(old age) is spent in *wretchedness*. But a youth of virtue secures an old age of content, if not of cheerfulness and joy. The word Creator is plural in the original; as Elohim (rendered God) is in the Hebrew. An argument is thereby adduced for the doctrine of the Trinity. And indeed Creation is ascribed to all the Persons of the Godhead (Godhood.) See Gen. i. 1; John i. 3; Job xxvi. 13.

Three reasons appear in this verse for remembering God in thy youth. (1.) He is Creator. (2.) He is *thy* Creator. (3.) Evil days are coming to those that have no God. The next verses teach us that evil days consist in bodily and mental weakness.

2. *While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:*

3. *In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,*

4. *And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low;*

5. *Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:*

6. *Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.*

We have in these verses one of the most beautiful allegories ever penned or uttered. The image is that of a decaying and unprotected house, which represents the human body in old age. The value of an Eastern house consisted much in the following things. It should be built

in a sunny place with bright skies overhead, and beautiful scenery around. It should be guarded by bold and watchful keepers; having strong labourers to obtain provisions. It should have its latticed windows, and its folding doors. Trees should grow around the dwelling, in whose branches the birds should sing melodiously. Music should resound through the halls. Its apartments should be lighted up at night with golden lamps suspended with silver cords. A cooling fountain standing in its outer court, with a costly pitcher by which to draw the water, should complete its comforts. Such a house represents the vigour of the human body in youth or in manhood's prime.

In perfect contrast to this, is the house to which Solomon introduces us in this allegory. Here stands an old house, on a drizzling rainy day, when the light is obscured by a dense fog, or by clouds shutting out the light—the keepers trembling—the strong providers made decrepit—no grinding going on—the windows closed—the doors shut—the inhabitant or owner nervous and afraid of every sound, even of the voice of the bird once so pleasant. No melodious notes of music are in the halls. The owner fears to ascend the stairs, but creeps into some hidden corner. The lightest thing is a burden. Desire fails. And finally, by some sudden calamity, the silver cord by which the lamp is suspended breaks; and the golden lamp is itself dashed and broken on the pavement below. The wheel by which the water is drawn, and the pitcher also, are broken and in ruins. There is a general wreck, and all is desolation in that mansion once so beautiful and full of mirth. Such is extreme old age, ending in death. Happy is he, who, when the house of this tabernacle dissolves, has "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The second verse refers to *mental* infirmities. The

memory, understanding, will, affections, and imagination, all fail. The failing of these is the darkening of the light, the sun, the moon, the stars. "Nor the clouds return after the rain." In youth there may be a shower; but it soon passes away with a cloudless sky. The heart is buoyant. It is but a spring shower followed by sunshine. In Judea, and other countries, they have their rainy seasons; and when the rain seems to be ceasing, it gathers again and again for another and yet another shower. The clouds returning after the rain represents the winter season of life. One mental infirmity follows another in quick succession.

We have the *bodily* infirmities, in the next four verses. (3–6.) (3.) "The keepers of the house tremble." In the East it is often necessary to have guards placed around one's dwelling to protect it from marauders. "Threescore valiant men" guarded the bed of Solomon. Sol. Song iii. 7, 8. The keepers of this "earthly house" of ours, are the arms and hands, which in old age often tremble with palsy. "The strong men bow themselves." The legs bow in feebleness, and the knees totter. "The grinders cease." The hand-mill was an essential article of furniture in Eastern houses. There are several allusions to this in the Bible. The double teeth, by us called "grinders," are evidently meant. They "cease because they are few." They cannot masticate the food. "Those that look out of the windows shall be darkened." The lookers out of the windows,—literally. The eyes are the windows of the soul. The word might be translated "lattices," or "net-work curtains." Was Solomon acquainted with the anatomy of the eye? It would *seem* so. The pupil of the eye is surrounded with a net-work, by which it is dilated and contracted, just as a window is by curtains, and made to admit more or less light as the

inmate desires. An old person sees obscurely—the window is darkened. (4.) "The doors shall be shut in the streets." In the original, it is "folding-doors." Some understand by the doors of the house, the ears. But this would not answer so well to the term *folding*-doors. It means, evidently, the *lips*. The jaws of leviathan are called the "doors of his face." Job xli. 14. So Micah vii. 5:—"Keep the doors of thy mouth." By the doors being "shut in the streets," may be meant the lips falling into the mouth for want of teeth. In the Hebrew it is *street*, not streets. A street is a cleft between two rows of houses. The roof of the mouth, between the rows of teeth, is like a street. "The sound of the grinding is low," when, for want of teeth, soft food only must be used, and hence no noise is made, as there is when hard bread or parched corn is masticated. "He shall rise up at the voice of the bird;" or rise from slumber at the least noise. Perhaps it means that the inmate, in constant fear, mistakes the least noise for an approaching enemy, or supposes that the crowing of the cock is the precursor of evil. Restless at dawn of day, he rises when the cock crows. "All the daughters of music shall be brought low." The old man loses the power of making music; or loses his love for music; or musical strains *seem* to him to be low on account of his deafness. Hengstenberg says, "The term 'daughter' is used to designate that which belongs to a thing. Here accordingly the qualities which belong to song, the singing qualities, are personified as the daughters of song."

(5.) "Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fear shall be in the way." Original—"terrified in the way." Eastern people go up to the roofs of their houses. Old men are afraid to do so any more. And they are afraid of stumbling in ways once familiar. "The

almond tree shall flourish." Some translate it, "The almond is spurned, or rejected;" *i. e.*, on account of weakness of the stomach. Our translation is sustained by the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and by the Syriac version. Though some modern writers make other suggestions, it is altogether likely that the hoary head is meant by the flourishing of the almond tree. The objection made to this interpretation is,—the blossoms of the almond are not perfectly white, yet the resemblance is sufficiently close. It seems very natural that in the description of an old man something should be said about his gray hairs. The trees about a house may be beautiful, though the house itself is decaying. So gray hairs are a crown of glory to the infirm old man. "And the grasshopper shall be a burden." The locust is meant. Its weight, though so small, oppresses. Or as food it burdens the stomach. To say that an old man resembles a locust in shape, is too fanciful an interpretation. The remainder of the verse is literal. Desire fails. The appetites and passions have all diminished in force. Man goes to his long home,—"the house of his eternity," in the original. "The mourners go about the streets." Hired mourners who attend funerals, and publish the grief of survivors. The failing of desire is well expressed by the aged Barzillai (2 Sam. xix. 35:) "I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?"

(6.) "Or ever the silver cord is loosed," &c. This probably refers to the cord by which the lamp was suspended from the ceiling. Original—"pale-cord." The spinal marrow communicating between the brain and nerves is pale or white like silver. When it is loosed, there is paralysis. The brain may well be called "the

golden bowl," on account of its shape and yellowish colour. True, it is not suspended from or by the spinal column, but it is connected with it, as the bowl of a lamp is with the cord. The figure is most apposite; for the light of the understanding is in the brain. The failing heart is the pitcher broken at the fountain. It is at the very fountain of life. The life is in the blood. Gen. xvii. 11. The heart is the receptacle—the pitcher. If the heart is pierced or broken, life ceases. "The wheel broken at the cistern" is the system of veins and arteries which carry the blood round and round continually, like a wheel—twenty-five or thirty-five pounds every three or eight minutes. Hervey is accounted the first to have discovered the circulation of the blood. But here it would seem as though Solomon understood it, anticipating Hervey by more than 2,000 years. Life ceases when the blood fails to circulate. There can be no water drawn from tanks and cisterns in the East, when the wheel is broken.

7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

This verse is literal. The body formed of earth returns to earth. The spirit returns to God. And now the union of soul and body, so intimate as to constitute a single person, is dissolved. The body is placed in the grave, ordinarily, where it rests till the resurrection. The soul ascends to God, to be judged, and condemned or acquitted. The spirit does not die. It is God's breath,—not an emanation from him as though a part of himself,—but a creation. It is immortal. In full confidence of continuing to live, Jesus said to his Father, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." Stephen with a like confidence said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The soul of the wicked man ascends to God first, to be assigned to its appropriate place.

"Ascends to God,—not there to dwell;
But hears her doom, and sinks to hell."

This seventh verse seems to close Solomon's sermon or treatise. And what a sublime close it is! Here, in a small compass, he leads the mind to youth, old age, death, the judgment!

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *Youth is the proper time for seeking God's favour.* "Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth." Youth is the season of *hope*. The heart is buoyant. "The clouds return not after the rain." A shower there is, often; but the full-orbed sun shines out brightly again, and care and sorrow are dispelled. Youth is the time for *enterprise*. The keepers of the house do not tremble. The strong arms are nerved to repel the blows of an adversary; or, if need be, to hurl with David's strength the stone, against a giant foe. The steps are firm to scale the mountain. The eyes undimmed quail not at difficulties. The blood is rich with health. Now, young friend, is your time for commencing in earnest the greatest work of life. With faculties unimpaired,—with force undiminished,—with habits of delay not formed,—give your souls to God. Let your hand, strong compared with the hand of age, but very weakness compared with the strength of God; grasp his hand of power. Let your young impulsive heart beat close to his great heart that throbs with love to you. Leap up to his arms, as the gleeful child leaps up to the extended arms of an indulgent father. *Remember* your Creator. Think of the Father—of his wisdom and power that planned and spake forth the universe—of his holiness, and be penitent—of his works of love, and be full of thanksgiving. Think of Jesus—of his person, who in mid-life vigour made the greatest sacrifice

that earth ever saw—of his offices, his glorious salvation offered freely to us. Think of the Holy Spirit—of his power to search the heart, and to pour into the wounded spirit the oil of consolation. Think of God's law, and meditate thereon day and night. Then come in penitence and faith, and cast your poor, helpless, dying souls on Him that died for you. Be saved! Be spared the sorrows of a sinful old age; be spared the days of darkness reserved for the wicked during that long, long period following the present life, ending *never!*

II. *The infirmities of old age may be borne with joy.* Many old persons are happy in God, and the most cheerful of all men. Those only, whose unpardoned sins press upon them, feel old age a burden. The clouds return after the rain, but there is sunshine in the heart of the aged saint. The palsied arms are strengthened "by the arms of the mighty God of Jacob."

And the future is full of joyful anticipations. That infirm tread that is soon to totter into the grave, will be the tread of a conqueror in the streets of the new Jerusalem. Those windows of the soul, now so dark, will be opened upon the visions of glory. Take courage, aged Christians. You now rise up at the voice of the bird;—you will soon rise up at the harps of the redeemed, and yourselves join the blessed choir, where the daughters of music shall never be brought low. You will no longer be afraid of that which is high; but mounting courageously far above all heavens, no highest pinnacle of glory will make you dizzy. Instead of the grasshopper being a burden, you will be able to sustain that "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," of which your "light afflictions" are a precursor. Yes, no sooner will the silver cord be loosed, and the golden bowl broken, than God will be the

everlasting strength of your hearts, and your portion for ever. The pitcher and the wheel may be crushed at the fountain, but you will shout as Israel did at Beer, "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it."

Ye aged Christians, long have ye borne the heat and burden of the day. Yet a little while, and your toil will end in everlasting rest. Sing then with Charles Wesley:—

> "In age, and feebleness extreme,
> Who shall a helpless worm redeem?
> Jesus! my only hope thou art—
> Strength of my failing flesh and heart.
> Oh let me catch a smile from thee,
> And drop into eternity."

III. *That is a solemn moment which brings the soul directly to God.* The *body* is changed. It is a sad sight to see the body of a loved one committed to the earth. But it is a joyful thought that it shall rise again through our glorious Redeemer. But the *soul* makes a more wonderful transition, as, like an uncaged bird, it mounts upwards to the skies. From the frail body, like a house in ruins, it suddenly rises to the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This is the lot of the righteous.

Far otherwise is the portion of the wicked.

Trace the flight of the soul that dies in its sins! It has left its clay tenement, where weeping friends are congregated. The world recedes from view. It leaves all sublunary things—things under the sun. What object now meets its gaze? The burning throne of God! One sits thereon from whose face the heavens and the earth flee away in terror. Swift messengers come, the executioners of justice, arrayed with the insignia of office to perform the will of him whose angels they are. By these

the trembling soul is carried away to the place of punishment. And now is known what is meant by the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

But turn and trace the spirit of the just. As it leaves the expiring body, a chariot is ready to convey it upward. (The chariots of God are—thousands of angels. Ps. lxviii. 17.) Away it speeds its flight to the third heavens. There is the same great white throne which had so terrified the sinner. But it is not a throne of wrath. Its lustre dims the sun, (but the eyes of glorified saints and angels have no weakness.) The new-comer faces the glory without blenching, and he that sits upon the throne smiles complacently. What a transition! It is a sudden escape from "the pains, and groans, and dying strife" of the death-bed, to the perfect bliss of heaven. What are the first impressions of the soul on its introduction into Paradise? How strange, too, to be called from perfect health, as some are—from labour—from reading or conversation, and caught up suddenly to the third heaven! Some have gone from the battle-field—from the thunder of cannon and the shouting of victors, to the harpers harping with their harps, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder." May every reader, whether called suddenly, or allowed to linger long in pining sickness, have a glorious transition from this evil world to the purity and bliss of heaven.

Analysis. Verses 8–14.

These verses (like i. 1, 2) seem to have been written by some other person, and not by Solomon. It is not uncommon for the sacred books to be supplemented by some other persons besides the writers of them. (See remarks on this subject in the Preface.)

VERSE 8. This is a repetition of i. 2, to show that the Appendix to the work here commences, as the Preface of the work closed.

9, 10. The Preacher's qualifications for giving instruction, were his wisdom and assiduity.

11. Wise men's words, as coming from God (the "One Shepherd") stimulate like a goad, and penetrate and fasten like a nail.

12. Men should therefore be admonished by the teachings of the wise (the inspired) rather than read and study the many profitless and wearisome things written by the foolish.

13, 14. The whole matter is summed up thus: The whole duty (or profit) of man, is, to be pious and obedient, and thus prepare for the judgment.

EXPOSITION.

8. *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.*

This is a repetition of verse 2d of chapter 1st, and seems to show that the person who supplemented Solomon's treatise now begins to use his own language again as in the introduction. (i. 1, 2.) This verse is a general expression of the worthlessness of all earthly things in themselves considered, as taught by "the Preacher" in this Book of Ecclesiastes. The second verse of chapter first closed the Preface; this commences the Appendix. What could be more natural than for an editor, after reading a treatise, to write a few words of introduction giving his opinion of the general teachings of the treatise; and then to write a few words at the close beginning with a repetition of his opinion thus expressed? Nor does such a view of the matter militate against the inspiration of the Editor any more than that of "the Preacher."

9. *And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still*

taught the people knowledge: yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs.

Solomon was the wisest man of his day. God had said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee." (1 Kings iii. 5.) Solomon accordingly asked for "an understanding heart." God was pleased with this request, and said to him, "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." (ver. 12.) He was wise too "concerning the name of the Lord." (1 Kings x. 1.) This has reference to his knowledge of God's word so far as it was then written, and his piety and zeal in the worship of God; also to his utterance of important truths, some of which he was inspired thus to utter. He was unwearied in study. Nor did he, like the miser with his gold, conceal his treasures of wisdom. But he gathered the people and taught them. Not only the Queen of Sheba, but many others came from distant parts to hear him.

"He gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order, many proverbs."

Reference is made, no doubt, to both Solomon's inspired and uninspired proverbs. We have only those of his proverbs that were inspired. "He spake 3,000 proverbs." We have but 915 verses in the Book of Proverbs. These verses are not *all* proverbs, and the last two chapters are the words of Agur and Lemuel. Besides, sometimes a proverb extends through two or three verses. Therefore we have not more than about 800 inspired proverbs of the 3,000 that Solomon spake. The rest were uninspired.

10. *The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written, was upright, even words of truth.*

They were acceptable to God and to men. The Preacher was not a man-pleaser, but he made his discourse pleasing that it might attract and benefit. He taught with "upright" words—"words of truth." Let a teacher utter words of truth, and then he may ornament and beautify his instructions by the most attractive and winning style.

11. *The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.*

This imagery is taken from pastoral life. Goads were wooden rods with iron points, with which plowmen urged on their oxen. Reference is made to this where Jesus said to Saul, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (the goads.) The word of God is full of goads. It is "sharper than a two-edged sword." By its power the heart is pierced. Sinners are "pricked in their hearts" till they are constrained to cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?"

But "nails" are mentioned. Shepherds had nails to fasten their tents with. So the truth *fastens* itself in the heart, and all efforts to shake it off will fail when God drives it home. It is "fastened by the masters of assemblies." By the prophets and other teachers under the Old Testament dispensation;—by apostles and other preachers, under the new;—by all authorized teachers of divine truth in every age. All true teachers of the people are "masters of assemblies." "Which are given from one shepherd," means either that the *nails* or the *masters of assemblies* are given by one shepherd; or that *both* are. God is the great Shepherd of Israel. Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. He has given the under shepherds as teachers,—as masters of assemblies. And he has given them the nails which penetrate the heart and there abide. Hengstenberg says: "From the praise of his own book, the author

passes to the praise of the great whole, of which his work was destined to form a part, to wit, of the canonical books of the Old Testament." The view already taken, that this last part is supplementary and by another relieves us from the necessity of supposing that the author praised his own book, or spoke of his own wisdom. No doubt, however, but the author includes in "the words of the wise" the Old Testament Scriptures generally. It is very natural for the writer after speaking of Solomon's wisdom; and of his acceptable, upright, and truthful words, as a part of inspiration; to say that the words of the wise (in the plural)—wise men—inspired authors of the sacred books; were as nails and goads. Hengstenberg says again, "The sense of the two clauses is the following—that the sacred writings of Israel are endowed with a deeply penetrating power, in distinction from all worldly literature, which can only produce a superficial impression, and is incapable of stirring the deepest depths of the mind and heart." The penetrating effect of God's word is because it is inspired,—"given by one Shepherd." The author is but "one" though the writers are many. "The 'Shepherd' can only be the Lord." He is often called Shepherd. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel." "Thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel:" Gen. xlix. 24. "The Lord is my shepherd;" said David; and Isaiah said, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom." As a Shepherd, God gives the Scriptures as precious food to his flock.

12. *And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

By the affectionate epithet "my son," the writer would

call the attention of men to the truth, just as the aged John said so often in his epistles, "my little children." "By these, be admonished." By these *inspired* words. Books may be multiplied, and men may weary themselves with study; but heavenly wisdom *only* is deserving of our most earnest and untiring pursuit. Dr. Clark says, "Let the trembling knees, the palsied hands, the darkened eyes, the aching heart, and the puzzled mind of every real student, declare how true" it is, that much study is a weariness to the flesh. He who seeks in human literature to solve the enigma of life will be utterly disappointed. It is solved by the "words of the wise,"—by the Scriptures. In these sacred writings one may revel continually, and never tire. There is no "weariness of the flesh" in meditating upon God's blessed gospel day and night. We are led by this text of Scripture to believe that "many books" were in existence even in Solomon's day. "Recent investigations have put beyond doubt that, in earlier times, Egyptian literature was both comprehensive and vain and unfruitful. According to Diodorus, i. 49, over the sacred library of Thebes was the inscription, "Pharmacy of the Soul," *ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον*. We read of wise men in the days of Solomon, with whom he is compared. They lived in the "east country" and in Egypt. (See 1 Kings iv. 30, 31.) These may have been authors of celebrity in that day.

Had the writer lived in our day, he might indeed have said, "Of making many books there is no end." It may be, however, that he did refer to the future, even to the present time; for he was writing with the pen of inspiration, and not for his own age merely. The writer would teach all other ages, as well as his own, that the "words of truth" are the only books of real value, all others producing weariness. The Bible is the Book of books.

13. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.* 14. *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

These verses are a most fitting close to the teachings of the book. The conclusion of the whole—the main thought—is, that it is the whole interest of man to be pious and obedient; and thus prepared for the judgment. In every nation he that fears God and works righteousness is accepted of God. Acts x. 35. "This is the whole of man," is the literal rendering. Our translation supplies the word "duty." But as the great inquiry of the treatise is, What *profit* has a man of all his labour? it would seem that the true word to be supplied is, "profit," or "interest." Solomon sets out with the inquiry, *What profit is there in this life if there is no other?* In the discussion, it appears that there is *no* profit. But this conclusion is reached, *there is another life.* Then the great truth looms up distinctly;—there being another life, *the whole profit of man consists in fearing God and keeping his commandments.* The only profit of life is in fearing God—*piety,* and keeping his commandments—*obedience.* Fear God, and keeping his commandments will follow. Piety is the principle from which obedience springs.

It is meet that the last verse should bring us right to the judgment-seat and leave us there. Every work, and every secret thing, good and evil, will be brought to the judgment. Sinners may put far off the evil day, and cry, "peace, peace," but the solemn day will come. We are not like the beasts that perish, but *rational,* ACCOUNTABLE beings, destined to live FOR EVER!

SUGGESTED REMARKS.

I. *The true stimulant and bond to duty is the word of God.* Its teachings are goads to stimulate,—nails to fasten. Stimulation, excitement, is the demand of this age. The spur, the goad,—not the rein, is sought for. The hearts of all beat with anticipation. The *body* must be stimulated with highly seasoned viands and ardent spirits. Intoxicating liquor must be used in the work-shop, the harvest-field, and the camp, to the endangering of every human interest. The body is thus brought to premature decay. Even *tobacco* shortens multitudes of lives. The *mind* too must be stimulated by tales of romance, and startling adventures. But the true stimulant, the only one that leaves the soul in health and vigour, is the word of God. It goads the conscience—it arouses to anxious inquiry—it leads to Jesus—it excites to prayer—to obedience—to every duty. Under the power of this stimulus man can achieve heroic deeds. How full of energy does that mind become that is filled with thoughts of God its Maker, Ruler, Father, Judge! In God's word are the most exciting themes. Man's ruin and danger—the arrival of a Deliverer on earth—his pure character, his mighty deeds, his atoning sacrifice, his glorious conquest—the Comforter, to convince of sin, of righteousness, of judgment; and to lead to Jesus. And then, the worth and destiny of the soul—its flight from the body—its meeting with the great Judge—its anguish indescribable, or its bliss unspeakable! These are themes full of wonder and of absorbing interest. Surely the word of God is a "*goad!*"

But the word of God is also a "*nail.*" It *fastens to duty.* The world allures—Satan tempts—our hearts are ready to yield. But God's word has nailed us to his service—to Christ—to duty. We *cannot* go away. We

are bound by fetters stronger than death. May Divine grace fasten our hearts to God!

"Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee."

II. *The true interest of man is to fear God, and keep his commandments.* This settles all the questions of ancient philosophy about "the chief good." This settles the anxious inquiries of the present day as to duty. Piety and obedience are the whole duty and *interest* of man. Let us reverence our Heavenly Father, and entrust all our interests into his hands. He watches over our path and our pillow, and we are safe under the covert of his wings. Let us fear God by genuine penitence, and seeking forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. His law is for our guide—let us obey it. It is the transcript of his holy will. In a child nothing is so beautiful as cheerful obedience. The parent smiles with joyful approval. And God smiles approvingly on all his obedient children. Religion begins in *the fear of the Lord*, and it matures into *obedience*. The life of the future harvest is in the seed cast into the bosom of the earth. The rain-drop moistens it—the sun-beam warms it into life. It grows, matures, ripens into a harvest. So, in beautiful order, under the genial rays of the Sun of righteousness, the implanted fear of the Lord ripens into a golden harvest of duty. Faith overcomes the world—works righteousness—stops the mouths of lions—turns to flight the armies of the aliens.

III. *Let us turn our thoughts once more to the final trial.* We have the judgment here presented in a few solemn words. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." The sublime descriptions of the

judgment found in the New Testament are more full, but not more explicit than this. The works and thoughts of good and bad will be revealed and judged. We must all appear before that throne on which the Son of man shall sit as the impartial Judge of the universe. In a great assemblage on earth, among the vast sea of heads with which we are surrounded, we may pass unnoticed. But when the immense assembly gathered from the four quarters of the globe, and from the deep sea, shall stand before God, every one will be as conspicuous as though he alone had been called to give up his account.

Now the good and bad cannot be easily distinguished. They meet and dwell together. The universe is mingled. Good angels and bad traverse the earth. Satan tempts and harasses believers, and Gabriel watches over their pillow. The world is a market-place or fair, where all kinds meet promiscuously. But at the judgment there will be a *separation*. After "the sign of the Son of man in heaven," and all the tribes of the earth mourning, the Son of man is himself seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The dead arise—the living are changed. Angels come—the great trumpet is blown. The elect are gathered from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Attended by a glorious retinue of angels, the Son of man sits upon the throne of his glory. All nations stand before him. The crisis of the most intense interest now arrives. He *separates* the throng of human beings one from another. Earthly distinctions have no place now. The line runs through churches and families, dividing asunder those united by the tenderest ties. Sentence is pronounced:—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment;"—those "into life eternal." Reader, in that day, when you and the writer shall see the "great white

throne, and him that sitteth thereon," from whose face the earth and the heaven shall flee away; and the books shall be opened; and the dead shall be judged; may we find our names in letters of light written in the Lamb's book of life. And may we hear the sweet voice of Jesus saying to us, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Amen, and amen.

THE END.

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